Nan Sherwood at Lakeview Hall

To [redacted].

Best wishes from
Margaret.

XMAS. 1938.

Nan Sherwood at Lakeview Hall

NAN SHERWOOD AT LAKEVIEW HALL

OR

THE MYSTERY OF THE HAUNTED BOATHOUSE

BY

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NAN SHERWOOD AT LAKEVIEW HALL

CHAPTER I

THE BRAND NEW BAG

THERE would have been no trouble at all, Nan was sure, had it not been for that new bag.

In the first place it was a present from her Aunt Kate Sherwood, although Nan purchased it herself. The purchasing of most of her school outfit was supervised by Mrs. Harley, at the same time that her own daughter's was bought, but a few last purchases were left to the girls and Nan and Bess certainly had a most delightful time shopping in Chicago for a week, before they started for Lakeview Hall.

Of course, Bess' mother was right at hand to advise and guide; otherwise careless Bess would have bought with prodigal hand, and cautious Nan's outfit would not have been as well selected as the girl's absent mother would have desired.

But nobody interfered with the matter of the

brand new bag. Nan and her chum went to one of the smartest leather-goods shops and selected the shiny, russet-leather beauty without any adult interference save that of an obliging clerk. Mrs. Henry Sherwood had saved the money herself and insisted upon Nan's taking it and purchasing "just the handsomest traveling bag the money would buy."

"You know, honey-bird," the good woman said to her niece, the evening before Nan left Pine Camp —which was away up in the Peninsula of Michigan. "You know, honey-bird, money's been scarce with your Uncle Hen and me for some time back; but now that the trouble about the Perkins Tract is settled, and he can go to lumbering again, we'll be all right.

"I honestly do believe, Nan, that if you hadn't made such a friend of Toby Vanderwiller and of his wife and his crippled grandson, and if you and your Cousin Tom hadn't helped Tobe out of the swamp when he got mired in the big storm, that maybe the trouble about the boundary line between your uncle's timber option and Gedney Raffer's tract, wouldn't have been settled, in court or out, for a year or two.

"That being the case," Mrs. Sherwood pursued, "your Uncle Henry and I, and Tom and Rafe, would have been mighty poor for a long time to come. Now the prospect's bright before us, child, and I want you should take this I've saved from my

egg and berry money, and buy you just the handsomest traveling bag you can get for it.

"I've seen 'em all pictured out in the mail-order catalogue—full of brushes, and combs, and cut-glass bottles to hold sweet scent, and tooth-powder, and all sorts of didos. That's the kind I want you to have."

"Oh! but Aunt Kate!" Nan Sherwood said doubtfully, "this is a great deal of money to spend for a hand bag."

"I wish 'twas twice as much!" declared the lumberman's wife, vigorously.

"Twice as much?" Nan gasped.

"Yes. Then the things could be gold trimmed instead of only silver. I want you to have the very nicest bag of any girl going to that big school."

The awe-struck Nan and the delighted Elizabeth were quite sure that the woman from the Michigan Peninsula had her wish when they walked out of the leather-goods shop, the handsome russet bag firmly clutched by its possessor.

The bag was packed at once, for its purchase was almost the last bit of shopping there was to do before the chums from Tillbury left Chicago. Mrs. Harley rose early in the morning to go with them to the train. She declared that afterward she intended going back to the hotel to "sleep for a week."

"I'd rather superintend the general fall cleaning at home than get you two girls ready to go to boarding school again," she sighed.

"I'm sure you've been awfully good to me, Mrs. Harley," said Nan. "My own dear Momsey Sherwood could have treated me no more kindly. And, of course, she couldn't have shopped for me so well, for she has been too much of an invalid for a long while to take any interest in the shops."

Mrs. Harley kissed her heartily. "You blessed child!" she declared. "*You're* no trouble to suit. Bess is the finicky person." Her daughter began to pout. "Oh, you are, Miss!" and her mother held up an admonitory finger and shook it at Bess. "Next time I shall buy what I think is proper and leave you at home while I am buying. Why! these children nowadays are more fussy about their frocks, and more insistent upon the style of them, than their mothers. What I shall do, Elizabeth, when your little sisters are old enough to go away to school, I—do—not—see!"

"Oh, by that time," said Bess, the modern, "I shall be 'out,' I hope, and may have really something to say about my own clothes."

"Hear her!" ejaculted Mrs. Harley. "It will be several years yet, young lady, before you will be 'out,' as you call it, or be allowed to spend your father's money as lavishly as you would like to."

Nevertheless she kissed her daughter tenderly,

just before the train started, and Bess forgot for a moment that she was anything but a young girl going a long way off from a very dear and indulgent mother. They clung to each other for that tender, heart-breaking moment, and Nan Sherwood's eyes overflowed in sympathy.

Nan had been through the same ordeal six months before, when her own dear mother and father had started for Scotland, while she left Tillbury on the very same day for her uncle Henry's backwoods home in the heart of the Upper Michigan forest.

"Don't cry, Bess," she begged her chum when the train was out of the station and the "clip, clip, clip-py-ti-clip" of the wheels over the rail joints had tailed off into a staccato chatter, scarcely discernible through the steady drumming of the great trucks under the chair-car. "Don't cry. You know, honey, your mother isn't going to be near as far from you as my dear Momsey is from me."

"I don't care," sniffed Bess. "If I can't see her. But oh, Nan Sherwood!" she added sharply. "What kind of grammar was that you just used—*'near as far'*? If Mr. Mangel, our high-school principal at Tillbury, thought you would use such language he would never have written to Dr. Beulah Prescott that he considered you entitled to a rating equal with the remainder of our class."

"Don't sniff and turn up your nose, Miss, at my

diction," laughed Nan. "Your nose is bound to be red if you keep on—and your eyes, too."

"Is it? Are they?" gasped Bess.

"Is it—are they *what*?" demanded Nan, rather startled.

"Why, my nose and eyes red!"

"Well! talk about grammar!" ejaculated Nan. "I wouldn't criticise, if I were you."

"Never mind the English language," begged Bess. "Let me look in your mirror."

Of course, that necessitated the opening of the brand new bag. Then, when Bess thought she had discovered a suspicious redness of the tip of her nose, she must needs use the powder puff which was one of the wonderful "didos" among the toilet requisites in the bag.

While Bess was so busily engaged in restoring the havoc made upon her fresh young countenance by her recent emotion, there sounded suddenly a heavy banging and thumping underneath the chair-car in which the girls were riding, though not at their end of the coach.

Nervous people at the rear of the car jumped up and one or two screamed. Almost instantly the train began to slow down, with much hissing of steam and compressed air, and soon came to a complete stop.

Nan had jumped up, too, but not because she was frightened. None of the trainmen came in of

whom to ask about the stop and Nan went to the front door and out into the vestibule. Even the colored porter was not in sight.

"What is it, Nan?" Bess asked, still powdering her nose, for she had been obliged to postpone this delicate operation until the train had come to its bumping stop.

"I don't know," answered her chum. "I'm going forward to ask."

But hardly had she said this, when the rear door of the car opened and a uniformed attendant said, speaking clearly:

"All passengers are requested to move into the rear coach, with all hand baggage. This car is to be taken out of the train at once because of an accident. All passengers will please move to the rear coach with hand baggage. Another chair car will be put in to accommodate you at the junction. All back to rear coach!"

He came through shouting these directions so that all in the car could hear him. Bess jumped up, very much excited now, with:

"Oh, my gracious! Do you hear that, Nan? Do get down my coat and suit-case. You're taller than I am."

Her chum good-naturedly did as she was requested and Bess started down the aisle. Indeed, the two friends were about the first to leave the chair-car by the rear door.

Just as they got into the vestibule, however, Nan noticed that her chum's hands were empty.

"Why, Bess Harley!" she cried. "Where's my bag?"

"Your bag?" returned Bess, with wide-open eyes. "Why! haven't you brought it?"

"Well!" But there! What was the use? Nan knew well just how heedless Bess was. There was positively no good in getting angry with her. "Here!" she exclaimed, thrusting the suit-case, the lunch box, and her chum's own wrap into Bess' hands. "Get a seat if you can and hold on to these while I go back for that bag."

"I must have left it right in the chair you sat in," said Bess, feebly.

Nan did not hear this. She had some trouble in getting back into the car, for she was stemming the tide of outflowing passengers.

She reached the spot at last. The more moderately moving passengers were all about her. On the floor between two of the chairs was the russet bag.

Nan seized it quickly and turned to hasten back to her chum. The aisle was clear for the moment and she ran.

Almost instantly a shrill voice cried out behind her:

"Here! how dare you? That's *my* bag. Stop thief!"

Nan Sherwood cast a horrified glance over her shoulder. Yes! the voice addressed her. An angry girl, very fussily and expensively dressed, had started wildly down the car after Nan, and again she shrieked:

"Stop thief!"

CHAPTER II

ALL ABOUT NAN

NAN SHERWOOD stumbled and would have fallen, for she could not pick her steps very safely with her gaze directed behind, had not a firm hand seized her shoulder. The gentleman who did this may have been as intent upon detaining the girl as upon saving her from an overthrow.

"Hoity-toity!" he ejaculated, in a rather querulous voice. "Hoity-toity!" he repeated. "What's this I hear? 'Stop thief'? Impossible!"

He was a lean-faced man with a deeply lined countenance, a big nose, and shell-bowed spectacles through which his pale, gray eyes twinkled, after all, in a rather friendly way. Or so the startled Nan thought in those few seconds that elapsed before the other girl reached them.

"Impossible!" repeated the man, having looked into Nan's eyes.

"I guess it isn't impossible!" cried the overdressed girl, seizing the handle of the russet bag and trying to jerk it out of Nan's hand. "The bold thing! She *is* a thief! And see her! She won't give it up!"

"Why—it's my bag!" murmured Nan, horrified by this utterly unexpected situation.

"It's not! it's mine!" asserted the other girl, striving with all her might to secure the bag.

But Nan Sherwood was no weakling. In fact, she was really very strong for her age. And her spring and summer in the Big Woods had bronzed her skin almost to the hue of a winter-cured oak-leaf. Her muscles were as well developed as a boy's. The angry girl could not get the russet bag away from Nan's secure grip.

"Wait! wait, young ladies!" urged the gentleman with the spectacles that made him look so owl-like. "There must be some mistake here."

"There is!" snapped the angry grl. "It's a mistake to let a little thief like her ride with respectable people. I'm going to have her arrested! I—I'll tell my father——"

All the time she was thus incoherently accusing Nan, she was likewise endeavoring to get possession of the bag. But Nan had no idea of giving up her Aunt Kate's beautiful present.

"Why—why!" Nan gasped. "It's mine! I bought it myself!"

"What a story!" shrieked the other girl. "A dowdy little thing like you never owned such a bag. Look at my card on the handle."

"That should settle it," said the bespectacled gentleman, with confidence, and he reached for the bag.

Nan allowed him to take it. To her amazement he slipped an engraved visiting card out of the frame set into the bag's handle. Nan almost dropped. She had not noticed the card during the struggle and she knew she never had owned a visiting card like that in her life.

The gentleman held the card very close to his eyes to read the name engraved upon it.

"Ahem!" he said. "I thought I recognized you, Miss Riggs, despite your wild state of alarm. 'Miss Linda Riggs,' " he added, repeating the name on the card. "Quite right. The bag is yours, Miss Riggs."

"I should think you would have known *that,* Professor Krenner, when I first spoke," snapped the girl, seizing the bag ungratefully from his hand. "Anybody ought to see what that girl is!" and she eyed poor Nan with a measure of disdain that might have really pained the Tillbury girl had she not just then been so much troubled by another phase of the incident.

"Why! where—where is *my* bag, then?" Nan gasped.

Professor Krenner glanced sideways at her. He was a peculiar old gentleman, and he believed deeply in his own first impressions. Nan's flushed face, her wide-open, pained eyes, her quivering lips, told a story he could not disbelieve. The professor's mind leaped to a swift conclusion.

"Are you sure you sat just there, child?" he asked Nan.

"Oh—I——"

He could see over the heads of the few curious passengers who had surged around them.

"Was your bag like Miss Riggs'?" he asked.

"Exactly," breathed Nan.

Just then a soft, drawling voice asked:

"Any ob yo' ladies an' gemmen done lef' a bag?"

The porter held out a russet leather traveling bag. Nan leaped for it with a cry of relief.

"It belongs to the young lady, porter," said Professor Krenner, authoritatively.

"Why, the bags are just alike!" cried one lady.

"I don't believe a dowdy thing like her ever honestly owned a bag like mine in this world!" Linda Riggs exclaimed bitterly. "She stole it."

Another passenger laughed. "As far as we know, my girl, you may have stolen your bag."

"How dare you?" gasped the dressy girl. "I guess you don't know who my father is?"

"I confess the crass ignorance that engulfs my mind upon that important point," laughed the unimpressed man, who looked as though he might be of some importance himself. "Who is your father, my dear?"

"He is Mr. Henry W. Riggs, and he just about owns this railroad," said the girl, proudly.

"I have heard of him," agreed the man. "And

you may tell him from me that if I owned as much stock in this road as he is supposed to, I'd give the public better service for its money," and the passengers went away, laughing at the purse-proud and arrogant girl.

Meanwhile Nan Sherwood had thanked the porter for recovering her bag and Professor Krenner for championing her cause. She did not look again at the girl who had so hurt and insulted her. But she was very pale and quiet as she went back to rejoin her chum, Bess Harley, in the other car.

That was the way of Nan Sherwood. When she was hurt she never cried over it openly; nor was it often that she gave vent to a public expression of anger.

For her age, Nan was strangely self-contained and competent. Not that she was other than a real, happy, hearty schoolgirl with a deal more than her share of animal spirits. She was so very much alive that it had been hard for her to keep her body still enough to satisfy her teachers at the Tillbury High School which, until the middle of the previous winter, she had attended with her chum.

Bess' father was well-to-do and Bess had had almost everything she really craved since the hour she was born, being the oldest of the "Harley tribe," as she expressed it. When it was decided that she should, at the end of her freshman year in high school, attend the preparatory school for girls,

known as Lakeview Hall, Bess was determined that her chum, Nan Sherwood, should go with her.

But Nan's parents were not situated at all as were Bess Harley's—neither financially or otherwise. Mr. Robert Sherwood had been, for years, foreman of a department in the Atwater Mills. Suddenly the mills were closed and Nan's father—with multitudes of other people—found his income cut off.

He owned a little cottage on Amity Street; but it was not all paid for, as Nan's mother had been a semi-invalid for a number of years and much of the money Mr. Sherwood might have saved, had gone for medical attention for "Momsey," as Nan called her mother.

But the invalid wife and mother was the bravest and most cheerful of the three who lived in "the dwelling in amity," as Mr. Sherwood called the little cottage, and it was she who inspired them to hope for better times ahead.

Nan could not fail to be benefited in character by such an example as her mother set; but the girl very well knew that, in their then present circumstances, there was no possibility of her entering Lakeview Hall in the fall with Bess Harley.

This was really a tragic outlook for the school chums; but in the very darkest hour a letter arrived from a lawyer, named Andrew Blake, of Edinburgh, Scotland, stating that a great uncle of Mrs.

Sherwood's had recently died, bequeathing her an estate valued at something like ten thousand pounds.

The only shadow cast upon this delightful prospect was the fact that Mrs. Sherwood must appear before the Scotch Court to oppose the claim of more distant relatives who were trying to break the will.

The doctors had already recommended a sea voyage for Mrs. Sherwood. Now it seemed a necessity. But her parents could not take Nan across the ocean. What should be done with the troubled girl was the much mooted question, when there burst in upon the family Mr. Sherwood's brother from Upper Michigan, a giant lumberman, who had come to Tillbury to offer any help in his power to Nan's father in his financial straits.

Immediately upon hearing of the legacy, Mr. Henry Sherwood declared he would take Nan back to Pine Camp with him, and in the first volume of this series, entitled "Nan Sherwood at Pine Camp, or, The Old Lumberman's Secret," are told all Nan's adventures in the Big Woods during the spring and summer, and until the time came for her to prepare to enter Lakeview Hall in September.

For, although the court proceedings regarding Mr. Hughie Blake's will had not been entirely settled, money had been advanced by Mr. Andrew Blake to Mr. Sherwood and the desire of Nan's heart was to be accomplished. She was now on her way to Lakeview Hall with Bess Harley; and, as we

have seen, she had not gone far on the journey from Chicago before Adventure overtook her.

This first was not a pleasant adventure, however; and it brought in its train incidents which colored all Nan Sherwood's initial semester at Lakeview Hall.

CHAPTER III

LINDA RIGGS

When Bess Harley heard about the over-dressed girl's accusation, and how Nan had been treated, she wanted to jump right up and "give the stuck-up thing a piece of my mind!" as she expressed it. Bess was very angry indeed, and quite overlooked the fact, of course, that her own carelessness had brought the trouble about.

"I'd have slapped her," declared the vigorous Bess. "Calling you a thief! Why! I couldn't have kept my hands off of her. Who is she?"

"I—I did not pay much attention to what she said about herself," Nan replied. "Only her name. That's Riggs."

"And that's homely enough," scoffed Bess.

"She is not homely," Nan confessed. "That is, I think she may be quite pretty when she isn't angry. And she had on a dress that would have made you gasp, Bess."

"Was it so pretty?"

"No; but it was of very rich material, and daringly cut," said her friend.

"Where is she now?" demanded Bess, standing

up to look over the day coach in which they now rode, for the chair-car with the broken rod had been left behind and the train was hurrying on to the junction.

"I think she went into the dining car, forward," said Nan.

"Humph! I wish we had. We could see out better."

"But we have a nice lunch, you know," Nan objected.

"Just the same, it's *common* to eat lunch out of a shoe-box on a train. I don't know what mother was thinking of. And we could have seen that girl with the fancy dress in the dining car."

"Pshaw!" laughed Nan. "You're always crazy after the styles. I don't wish to see her again, I assure you."

"I never saw such a girl as you," complained her chum. "You're as bold as a lion about some things and as meek as a mouse about others."

Nan's ready laugh was her only reply to this. She had begun to feel better. The sting of her encounter with the unkind and vulgar girl was soothed. She did not mind now the curious glances of those passengers from the chair-car who were within the limit of her view.

But Bess considered that one person's interest in her and her chum was distasteful. She whispered to Nan.

"Do you see that old, goggle-eyed gentleman staring at us, Nan? I declare! Are we a pair of freaks?"

"Perhaps he thinks so," chuckled Nan.

"He's awfully impolite."

Nan smiled frankly at the observant passenger across the aisle.

"Why, Nancy!" gasped Bess.

"He was kind to me. Professor Krenner is his name. I heard that girl call him so."

"Then they know each other?" said Bess.

"I presume so. But that did not keep him from believing *me*," Nan said. "He was nice."

"Well," whispered Bess. "He doesn't look nice." She began to giggle. "Did you ever see such glasses? He looks like an owl."

"I suppose he is a learned man," Nan returned, "so the look of wisdom becomes him."

"Humph!" ejaculated Bess. "That does not follow. What sort of professor did you say he is?"

"I didn't say. I only heard his name."

"What's that?" asked Bess, with growing curiosity.

"Professor Krenner," repeated Nan.

"Why—ee!" squealed Bess, suddenly.

She opened her hand-bag, which was quite commodious, and began frantically to dig into its contents. A dollar bill, two lozenges, a handkerchief, part of a paper of chewing gum, an elastic band, a

receipt for "freckle balm," a carved horsechestnut that her brother Billy had given her for a keepsake at parting, two bits of silk she had tried to match and could not, a tiny piece of sealing-wax, a much-creased letter (the last Nan had written her from Pine Camp), a funny little carved piece of ivory with a toothpick inside, a silver thimble (for Bess was sometimes domestic), a pair of cuticle scissors in a case, a visiting card, a strip of torn lace (likewise saved to "match"), a big, pearl button off her coat, a safety pin, and a molasses "kiss," fortunately wrapped in waxed paper, *fell to the floor.*

Nan patiently picked up the scattered possessions of her chum. There were other things in the bag, as Bess, with a squeal of satisfaction, proved by producing the folded announcement of Lakeview Hall.

"Goodness gracious, Bess!" sighed her friend. "How will you ever get all these things back into that bag?"

"Oh, tumble 'em in," said the careless Bess. "There must be room for them, or they would never have got in there in the first place. But listen here! I thought I remembered the name. Your Professor Krenner is on the staff of the school."

"What!"

"Yes. He teaches higher mathematics and architectural drawing. 'Architectural drawing'! What girl wants to take that? Of course, the mathema-

tics is compulsory, but the drawing is elective. Dear me! he's a sour looking apple."

"Not when you get close to him," Nan said quickly. "He has kind eyes."

"Humph!" Bess said again.

The man occupying the seat directly ahead of the two girls left at the very next station. Immediately Professor Krenner, who seemed to be much interested in Nan and Bess, crossed the aisle with his bag and sat down in the empty seat.

"Well, Miss," he said to Nan, his eyelids wrinkling at the corners as though a smile lurked behind the shell-bowed spectacles, "I see you have not allowed that little contretemps to blast all the pleasure of your journey. Are you and your friend going to school?"

"Yes, sir. This is my chum, Elizabeth Harley, Professor Krenner," Nan said.

"We are going to Lakeview Hall," Bess put in.

"Indeed?"

Bess showed him the printed circular sent out by Dr. Beulah Prescott. "We know all about you, sir," she said boldly.

"Do you?" he returned, with a rather grim smile about his wide mouth. "Then you know much more than I know myself, and I hope some day when we are better acquainted that you will explain to me, my dear, this complex personality that is known as Alpheus Krenner."

Bess flushed a little; but Nan chuckled. She liked this odd, ugly man, with his querulous voice and dry way of speaking. The twinkling eyes took the rough edge off much that he said.

"So you are two of the new girls I shall meet in my mathematics classes this year," he proceeded. "Do you both know your multiplication tables?"

"Yes, sir," said Nan demurely, while Bess looked rather indignant. "And we have been a little farther, too, in arithmetic. But how about the drawing, sir? Don't you expect to meet us in those classes?"

"No," replied Professor Krenner, soberly. "No girl cares for such instruction."

"No?" cried Bess, becoming interested.

"I have never had a single pupil in architectural drawing at Lakeview Hall," admitted the gentleman.

"Then why do they have it in the list of elective studies?" asked Nan, as much puzzled as her chum.

"Why, you see," said the perfectly serious professor, "Dr. Prescott insists upon each instructor having two courses—one study that is compulsory, and another that is elective. I am not a versatile man. I might have suggested instruction on the key-bugle, which I play to the annoyance of my neighbors; but there is already a musical instructor at the Hall.

"I might have suggested a class in the ancient and

honorable calling of cobbling (which is the handmaid of Philosophy, I believe, for I have found most cobblers to be philosophers) as I often repair my own shoes," pursued Professor Krenner, with the utmost gravity. "But there is a lady at the Hall who will teach you to do very ladylike tricks in burnt leather, and the two arts might conflict.

"So, being naturally of a slothful disposition, and being quite sure that no young girl would care for architecture, which is my hobby, I suggested my elective study. I think that Dr. Prescott considers it a joke."

Bess gazed at him with a puzzled expression of countenance. She did not exactly understand. But Nan appreciated his dry humor, and her own eyes danced.

"I believe I should like to take architectural drawing," she said demurely.

"Oh, Nan!" gasped Bess.

The professor's eyes twinkled behind the great, round spectacles. "I shall have to guard against that," he said. "No young lady at the Hall has ever yet expressed such a desire—not even your friend, Miss Riggs."

"Oh! you don't mean to say that that horrid girl who treated Nan so, goes to Lakeview Hall?" Bess cried out.

"She doesn't, really, does she, sir?" asked Nan, anxiously.

"Linda Riggs? Oh, yes. Didn't you know that?"

"Oh, dear, me," sighed Nan.

"Well!" cried Bess. "Who is she?"

"It is no breach of confidence on my part," replied the dry professor, "for she explains the fact to everybody, if I tell you that she is the daughter of Mr. Henry W. Riggs, the railroad magnate."

"Then she must be very rich," almost whispered Bess.

"Her father is," Professor Krenner said briefly.

Bess was deeply impressed, it was evident. But Nan already dreaded the shadow of Linda Riggs' presence in her school life.

CHAPTER IV

LUCK AND PLUCK

NAN found Professor Krenner a most amusing companion. She was eager to hear all she could from him regarding the school to which she and Bess Harley were bound.

The several male instructors at Lakeview Hall did not reside there, but lived near by in the village of Freeling. That is, the other gentlemen of Dr. Prescott's staff did so. Professor Krenner, who was unmarried, lived in a cabin he had built under the bluff on the lake shore.

"I am not far from the old boathouse, which is quite a famous place, by the way, as you will find when you get to the Hall. I am not troubled much with visitors because of my proximity to the boathouse. That is taboo with most of the young ladies."

"Why?" queried the curious Bess, promptly.

"I believe it is considered to possess one of those rare birds, a 'hant,' " chuckled the professor. "By night, at least, it is given a wide berth by even the most romantic miss in the school."

"Oh! a real ghost?" gasped Bess, deliciously excited.

"That is quite impossible, is it not?" queried Professor Krenner, in his gentle way of poking fun. "A ghost must necessarily be impalpable; then, how can it be real?"

Bess did not like being "made fun of," so she whispered to Nan; but the latter liked to hear the professor talk. That he was an odd man she was sure; but he was nothing like Toby Vanderwiller, the lumberman, or the other crude characters she had met at Pine Camp. What would Bess have said to Mr. Fen Llewellen, for instance? Or what would her chum think, even, of her cousin, Tom Sherwood?

Bess soon became anxious for a change and she begged Nan to come into the dining car for luncheon.

"But we have our lunch," Nan pointed out.

"I don't care. I don't want a lot of stale sandwiches and fruit," Bess declared.

"I don't want to waste what little money I have, when your mother bought us a perfectly lovely lunch," said Nan, cheerfully.

"It isn't nice to eat it here," Bess objected.

"Other people are doing so."

"I don't care," snapped Bess.

"Oh, now, Bess——"

"I've got a dollar," interrupted Bess. "I don't

see why mother wouldn't let me have more money while traveling; but she didn't."

"Good reason," laughed Nan. "You know you'd lose it." She failed to tell Bess that Mrs. Harley had entrusted her with some money to use, "if anything should happen." Nan was dependable and Bess' mother appreciated the fact.

"I'm going," said Bess, firmly, rising from the seat. "You'd better come, Nan."

"On a dollar?" declared Nan. "How far do you think you'll get in a dining car with all that wealth?"

Bess made a little face. "At least, we can have some tea," she said.

"Ex—cuse me!" exclaimed Nan. "I have a hearty appetite—and it is crying out for satisfaction right now. I know your mother did not fail to remember there were two high-school girls to feed. There is plenty here," and she took down the ample box which Mrs. Harley's thoughtfulness had supplied.

"That's all right," said her chum, slily. "There will be enough for me if I want some when I come back."

"I don't know about that," replied Nan, with gravity. "I shall try to eat it all."

There was no quarrel between them over such a small matter. Indeed, Nan and Bess had never

really had a serious difference since they had sat side by side in the kindergarten.

Bess had a reason for going into the dining car which she did not explain to her chum. She was curious about Linda Riggs. Everybody had heard of Mr. Henry W. Riggs, one of the big railroad men of the Middle West. Linda, of course, must be very aristocratic, Bess thought. And she had lots of money and lots of fine clothes.

Bess was deeply interested in pretty frocks, and she spent more than a few minutes daily reading the society column in the paper. She knew that Linda Riggs had an older sister who was already out in society. And once Bess had seen a group picture of the Riggs family. She thought she remembered Linda as a rather long-legged girl with plenty of bone and a snub nose.

When she entered the dining car she scarcely noticed the colored man who bowed her to a seat, so interested was she in viewing the girl whom she knew must be the railroad magnate's daughter.

As Nan had intimated, Linda Riggs' frock was stunning. It was not fit for a girl of her age to wear, it was too loud and, really, somewhat immodest. But it was evident that Miss Linda Riggs was quite used to wearing such apparel.

Although she had completed her luncheon some time before, it was evident that she had no inten-

tion of going into the day coach to which the other dispossessed passengers had been relegated when the rod broke under the chair-car.

They would soon be at the junction where another chair-car was to be coupled on.

Meanwhile a waiter was hovering about Linda Riggs' chair. She beckoned him, took the check nonchalantly, and with a pencil wrote her father's name upon it, passing both the check and her visiting card to the negro.

Bess watched breathlessly. It would have been the height of human delight, in Bess Harley's opinion, if *she* could do that.

The head-waiter came and bowed before Linda Riggs and showed that he appreciated the honor of her presence in the car. Bess forgot to drink her tea, and only crumbled her cake while she secretly watched the arrogant girl.

Bess had felt her anger rise at the unknown girl who so insulted Nan Sherwood, when first she had been told about the confusion over the traveling bags. But having heard the particulars of who Linda Riggs was, and of her father's riches, Bess' anger on her chum's behalf was soon drowned in curiosity.

She dawdled over her tea and cake until the train arrived at the junction, where another chair-car was in waiting. It was then, when Linda Riggs gathered up her purse and vanity bag, preparatory to

leaving the dining car, that Bess Harley made a mortifying discovery.

She wished to pay her own modest check. Perhaps she would get into the corridor of the car at the same time as the stylishly gowned girl, and Linda might speak. But clutching her gloves and looking wildly all about, *Bess could not find her hand-bag.*

Had Nan Sherwood had the first suspicion just then of her chum's predicament she would have flown to her assistance. But the train had halted, been broken in two, and the forward part of it had gone off with the locomotive to couple on to the waiting chair-car.

Nan asked the brakeman, and learned it would be ten minutes or more before the train would go on. The junction was not a very attractive spot; but already Nan was tired of riding. She asked Professor Krenner, who was reading, if he would look out for her baggage, and then she left the car.

Away up on a side track she saw the main part of the train, puffing down. The station, a weather-beaten, ugly old building, was not near. Indeed, there were not half a dozen houses in sight.

There were uncut weeds along the track, the cinderpaths were baked hard by the sun, and the whole situation was unlovely.

Near at hand was a shack, as ugly as all the other buildings; but there seemed to be some life about it.

At least, Nan, before she left the car, had seen the flutter of a child's skirt at the door of the hovel. She now crossed the tracks and went cautiously toward the miserable dwelling.

Nan saw the child again at the door of the cabin, but only for an instant. She shouted to the little one, but the latter bashfully slipped inside the door.

Nan was very fond of children and this little towheaded child interested her. There was still plenty of time before the two halves of the train would be brought together.

Nan ran across the desert of cinders and weeds toward the cabin. Nobody else appeared at the broken window or the open door, but suddenly she heard an ear-piercing shriek from within.

It was the voice of the child. It sounded from the loft of the cabin, into which the little girl had doubtless climbed to escape from Nan's thoughtless curiosity.

"What's the matter? What's the matter, my dear?" the girl from Tillbury cried, her feet spurred more quickly toward the cabin beside the railroad track.

The tiny girl shrieked for the second time—a shrill, agonized alarm. A more timid person would have been halted by the very nature of the cry. But Nan Sherwood did not hesitate. In a moment she was at the door of the hovel.

CHAPTER V

NAN SAVES ANOTHER, BUT IS HURT HERSELF

NAN looked searchingly into the gloomy interior of the hut. It was now no home, whatever it may have been in the past. It was only the wreck of a dwelling.

The girl could see little at first save the bare floor, the heaps of rubbish in the corners, and the fact that the rafters of the floor above were no longer covered with boards—if ever they had been.

The ladder which led to the loft was in the far corner. There was not a stick of furniture in sight.

Suddenly Nan saw something moving in a streak of dusty sunlight that penetrated the side window. It was a pair of child's thin legs kicking in the air!

Above the knees was the little torn frock, and, looking higher, and looking aghast, Nan saw that the tiny girl was hanging by her hands from the rafters.

"Oh, my dear!" she began, and stepped over the broken sill.

Then she halted—halted as though she had been frozen in her tracks.

From the floor, almost at Nan's feet, it seemed,

came a quick rustle—then a distinct rattle. The flat, brisk sound can never be mistaken, not even by one who has not heard it before. Wide-eyed, her breath leashed tight behind her teeth, Nan Sherwood stared about the floor. It was there, the coiled rattlesnake, almost under the bare, twitching soles of the hanging child's feet.

In these few passing seconds the eyes of the girl from Tillbury had become so used to the semi-gloom that she could see the fear-stricken face of the imperiled child. Horror and despair looked out of the staring eyes. Her frail arms could not long hold the weight of her body.

She must drop, and the arrogantly lifted head of the rattlesnake, crested with wrath, was ready for the stroke.

In running up the ladder to the loft the child had doubtless dislodged the rattlesnake which, upon slipping to the floor of the hut, had assumed an attitude of defense. The victim, flinging herself down between two rafters to escape, at once was in imminent danger of falling upon the angry snake.

The drop to the floor of the shack would not necessarily hurt the child, for the rafters were low. But a single injection of the poison of the serpent might be fatal.

These facts and conjectures had rushed into Nan Sherwood's mind in a flood of appreciation. She understood it all.

As well, she realized that, if the child was to be saved, she must perform the act of rescue. Before she could summon help to the spot the child's hold would slip and her tender body fall within striking distance of the snake.

Indeed, it seemed to Nan as though the little brown fingers were already slipping from the rough rafter. Her body stiffened as though she would leap forward to catch the child in her arms, as she fell.

But such a move might be fatal to herself, Nan knew. The serpent would change its tactics with lightning speed. Indeed, it sprang its rattle in warning again as though, with its beady, lidless eyes, it read Nan's mind.

The seconds passed swiftly. The child did not scream again, but her pleading gaze rested upon Nan's face. Nan was her only hope—her only possible chance of escape.

Nor did Nan fail her.

One glance the girl gave around the doorway. Then she stooped suddenly, seized upon a huge stone and hurled it at the upraised, darting crest of the snake.

Down upon the writhing coils the stone fell crushingly. The head of the snake was mashed, and the stone bounded across the floor.

Yet, as Nan leaped in with a cry and caught the falling child in her arms, a horrible thing happened.

The writhing, twisting body of the already dead snake coiled around her ankle and for that awful moment Nan was not at all sure but the poisonous creature had bitten her!

She staggered out of the hut with the child in her arms, and there fell weakly to the ground. Professor Krenner had been watching her from the car window, wondering at her recent actions. Now he leaped up and rushed out of the car. Several of the train crew came running to the spot, too, but it was the odd instructor who reached the fallen girl first, with the sobbing child beside her.

"Snake! snake!" was all the little one could gasp at first.

A brakeman ventured into the hut and kicked out the writhing body of the rattlesnake.

"Great heavens! the girl's been bitten!" cried one man.

"And she saved the kid from it," declared another.

"It can't be," said Professor Krenner, firmly. "You're not bitten, are you?" he asked Nan.

"Oh! I—I—thought I was," gasped the girl. Then she began to laugh hysterically. "But if I was the snake was dead first."

"That would not be impossible," murmured the professor.

Then he glanced at the crushed head of the rattlesnake, and felt relieved. "That thing never

struck after the stone hit it!" he declared, with confidence. "You are safe, my dear."

"But she's a mighty brave girl," cried one of the railroad men. "I was watching her at the door of that old shack, and wondered what she was doing."

Professor Krenner had helped the trembling Nan to rise and beat the dust off her skirt. The little girl's sobs soon ceased when she found she was not hurt.

"Here comes the rest of the train, Bill!" exclaimed one of the men.

"All back to the cars!" ordered Bill. "All aboard —them that's goin'!"

Nan stooped and kissed the tear-stained face of the child. "I don't know who you are, honey," she crooned, "but I shall remember all the term at Lakeview that down here at this junction is a little girl I know."

"No! no!" suddenly screamed the child, throwing her arms about Nan's neck. "I want you! I want you! I want my mom to see you!"

Nan had to break away and run for the train, leaving the child screaming after her. Professor Krenner was already at the car step to help her aboard. The two parts of the train had come gently together, and had been coupled. To Nan's amazement, as she approached the cars, she beheld her chum, Bess Harley, and the arrogant Linda Riggs, sitting comfortably together in a window of the

chair-car, talking "sixteen to the dozen," as Nan mentally expressed it. So busy was Bess, indeed, that she did not see Nan running for the train.

When the train had started, however, Bess came slowly back into the day coach.

"Let's go into the other car, Nan," she said. "Why! how rumpled you look! Did you eat all that lunch?"

"Not all," Nan replied, rather seriously. Then, as she gathered their possessions together for transportation to the chair-car she, by accident, kicked her chum's hand-bag out into the aisle. "Why! what's this?" Nan cried.

"Oh! there it is," Bess said. "The horrid thing! I didn't know what had become of it. And I was so mortified when I came to pay for my tea."

Nan looked at her aghast. "Whatever did you do?" she asked.

Bess had the grace to blush a little. But then she laughed, too.

"I will tell you," she said. "That Riggs girl isn't so bad, after all. She saw my difficulty and she just had my forty-five cents added to her check. It was real kind of her."

"Well! I never!" was all Nan could say.

She followed Bess forward to the other car in something of a daze, bearing the bulk of their impedimenta herself. Bess Harley hobnobbing with

the rude girl who had accused her, Nan, of being a thief! It seemed impossible.

"Where are you going?" Nan asked, as Bess continued up the aisle. "Here are empty seats."

"There is plenty of room up front," said Bess, cheerfully.

Nan saw Linda Riggs' hat "up front," too. "No," she said firmly. "I shall sit here."

"Oh—well!" Bess drawled, pouting.

For the first time in her life Nan Sherwood felt that a friend was disloyal to her—in appearance, if not actually. She realized that Bess must have been put in an exceedingly mortifying position in the dining car when she found she was without money with which to pay her check; and Miss Riggs may have been quite accommodating to offer to pay. Nan, however, could not imagine herself in her chum's situation, accepting the offer.

Bess needed only to wait until the first half of the train backed down to the rear half, when she could either have found her mislaid bag, or got the money for her lunch from Nan.

And then—to be so eager to continue the acquaintanceship with the uncivil girl! That was what pointed the dart.

"I don't care!" said the pouting Bess, at last. "I've got to pay her the forty-five cents. She'll think it funny."

"Pay her by all means," Nan said, striving not to show how hurt she was.

Bess briskly went up the aisle at this permission; but she did not return for an hour or more. Linda Riggs' conversation evidently quite charmed shallow, thoughtless Bess.

CHAPTER VI

HOW IT FEELS TO BE A HEROINE

Bess Harley came back to her chair facing Nan's quite full of a brand new subject of conversation.

"Do you know, Nan Sherwood," she cried, "that we've got a real, live heroine aboard this train?"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Nan. "What's she done?"

"They say she saved another girl's life back there where we stopped to take on the new car."

"At the Junction?" murmured Nan.

"Yes."

"Oh!" whispered her chum, and immediately became silent.

"My goodness!" ejaculated Bess. "I never saw such a girl. Aren't you interested at all?"

"I—I don't know," her chum replied in a very small voice.

"I wonder at you, Nan Sherwood!" cried Bess, at last, after staring at Nan for some moments.

"Why?"

"You don't seem at all interested. And this girl

was awfully brave. Linda says she ought to have a purse of money given her—or a Carnegie medal—or something. Linda says——"

"Linda?" repeated Nan, in wonder.

"Why, yes," Bess said. "She's not at all a bad girl—nothing at all like what you said she was."

"*I* said she was, Bess?" asked Nan, gently.

"Well! you don't like her," flared up Bess.

"I certainly do not," confessed Nan.

"You're prejudiced," pouted her chum.

"I certainly am prejudiced against anybody who calls me a thief," Nan declared firmly. "And so would you be, Bess."

"But she didn't know you, Nan."

"And I wish never to know her," said Nan, with spirit.

"But you'll have to," cried Bess. "She's going to the same school we do. She's been there for two years, you see, and she knows everything," declared Bess.

"Everything except how to be kind and polite," suggested Nan.

"There you go again!" cried Bess. "It doesn't sound like you at all, Nan."

"I'm sorry," said her chum. "I thought you knew me pretty well by this time, Bess. But, it seems you know this Linda Riggs better."

"Oh, Nan! I don't," and Bess was almost ready to cry. "She, Linda, was mad when she spoke to

you, of course. You ought to hear her speak of this brave girl back in the day coach, who saved the other one from the snake."

Nan was silent; but Bess was full of the topic and the pent up volume of her speech had to find an outlet. She rushed on with:

"It was just great of her, Nan! She reminds me of you when you saved Jacky Newcomb's life in the pond last winter—when he broke through the ice that evening."

Nan still was silent.

"This girl is just as brave as you were," declared Bess, with confidence. "She got off the train when it stopped. And she saw a little girl inside a house there by the railroad track. The little girl was in there and a great, big rattlesnake was coiled all ready to strike the poor little thing," went on Bess, breathlessly.

"The colored porter told Linda and me all about it. This brave girl threw a stone on the horrid snake and killed it before it could strike the child. And then she fainted and they carried her back to the car," pursued Bess. "And the colored man says the passengers are going to get up a memorial to present to this girl. I want to see her—to know her. Don't you, Nan?"

"Why!" gasped her chum, in much confusion, "I hope they won't do anything like *that.*"

"Like what?" queried Bess, in amazement.

"Bother her with any memorial—or whatever you call it—about what she did."

"Why, Nan!"

"Well——"

"You—you are perfectly horrid!" her chum declared. "She's a heroine! Think of it! We ought to do something for her, Linda says."

"We ought to let her alone," Nan declared vigorously.

"I—I never knew you to speak so, Nan," gasped Bess. "This brave girl——"

"How do you know she's brave?" snapped Nan, who was really getting cross. "She probably was scared half to death."

"Why! she's a heroine," declared Bess again.

"Well! how do we know how a heroine feels?" Nan asked, exasperated.

"Oh, Nan!"

"One thing I am sure of," went on Nan Sherwood, rather wildly. "She doesn't want a memorial—or a medal—or a purse——"

"Perhaps she's poor," put in Bess, obstinately.

"She's not!"

"Why—do you know who she is?" gasped Bess.

Nan was silent. She saw she had gone too far. If Bess should suspect——

The door at the rear of the car banged open. The conductor, leading a committee of passengers from the other coach, entered. He was smiling and the

ladies and gentlemen with him were smiling, too. When their gaze fell upon Nan they marched directly toward her.

Nan got up. She looked all about for some means of escape. Behind her, coming down the aisle, were several other people headed by Professor Krenner. And with them came the haughty girl, Linda Riggs.

"Oh! what's the matter?" cried Bess, starting up, too.

Nan was speechless, and red with confusion. Professor Krenner was smiling, as though he rather enjoyed Nan Sherwood's position.

"Oh, Miss Harley!" Linda Riggs cried to her new acquaintance. "They say that dear, brave girl is in this car."

"Is she?" asked Bess, feebly. "Oh, Nan! what do all these people want?"

"We want your friend, Miss Harley," Professor Krenner said drily. "I expect Linda did not know that. Nancy Sherwood, does she call herself? Well, Nancy Sherwood is a very brave girl, and we have all come to tell her so."

"Nan!" shrieked Bess, seeing a great light suddenly. "It was *you! You* are the heroine!"

"She most certainly is the girl, Miss," the conductor laughingly said. "And she has been trying to hide her light under a bushel, has she?"

Bess was stunned. The flushed countenance of

Linda Riggs was a study. Professor Krenner seemed to be secretly enjoying the unpleasant girl's amazement.

Linda seized Bess by the shoulder with a fierce grip—a grip that made the girl from Tillbury wince.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew her?" she hissed in Bess' ear as the passengers crowded about the much troubled Nan.

"I—I didn't know I knew her," gasped Bess. "How should I know Nan Sherwood was the girl who killed the rattlesnake?"

"I don't care anything about that!" cried the enraged girl. "You knew she was the one who stole my bag——"

"Stole your bag?" repeated Bess, her own wrath rising. "She didn't!"

"She did!"

"Nan Sherwood would not do such a thing. It was all a mistake, Linda, and you know it. She didn't have to steal your bag! She has one of her own quite as good——"

"And where did she get it?" sneered the railroad magnate's daughter, her face deeply flushed and her eyes fairly aflame.

"She bought it," declared Bess.

"Yes—she—did!" sneered Linda.

"She did! she did! I was with her yesterday when she bought it! So there!"

"And who are *you*?" responded the enraged girl.

"I don't know why I should believe you any more than that other one. You couldn't pay for your lunch just now, and I had to pay for you——"

"Oh!" gasped Bess, now quite in tears. "I paid you back—you horrid girl!"

"Dear me! did you?" responded Linda, airily.

"Yes, I did! You know I did!" Bess cried stormily.

"Perhaps. I never pay attention to such small matters," and the other tossed her head.

Of course, all this was very foolish, and Bess should not have paid Linda the compliment of attention. But she did, and Linda saw that her words stung—so she went on with her ill-natured tirade:

"There is one matter that I *shall* pay attention to," and she laughed, sneeringly. "I shall see to it that the girls of Lakeview Hall are informed of the character of you and your friend. One of you stealing my bag——"

"She didn't!" gasped Bess.

"Oh, she was stopped before she got very far, I grant you," laughed Linda, sarcastically. "And the other obliged to borrow forty-five cents to pay for her luncheon in the dining car. It will amuse my friends at the Hall, I assure you."

Nan had heard none of this conversation between her chum and Linda Riggs. Her own ears were actually burning because of the complimentary speeches the conductor and the passengers were mak-

ing. Poor Nan was backed up against her chair, blushing furiously and almost in tears of confusion, while Bess was carrying on her wordy battle with Linda, a few steps up the aisle.

But suddenly Nan, as well as those about her, were quite startled by Bess Harley's shrill outburst.

"Linda Riggs!" she cried. "You are the very meanest girl I ever saw! If you say another mean thing about Nan Sherwood I'll box your ears for you!" and the superheated Bess advanced upon her antagonist, her hand raised, prepared to put her threat into execution.

CHAPTER VII

LAKEVIEW HALL APPEARS

"WELL! I would have boxed her ears, I don't care!" Bess gasped, when Nan succeeded in pulling her down into her chair. "You ought to have heard what she said about you——"

"I'm glad I didn't," Nan answered and sighed. "And one good thing—it broke up that foolish speech-making. I'm so ashamed——"

"Of me!" flared up Bess. "I was only standing up for you."

"Hereafter, dear, do your standing up, sitting down," laughed Nan, hugging her still overwrought chum.

"Well," pouted the tearful Bess, "I—I don't care!"

"I'll fight my own battles."

"But you never fight!" burst out Bess.

"Isn't that just as well?" Nan observed, rather gravely. "Suppose your mother heard of your wanting to box a girl's ears in a public place like this car? And how Professor Krenner looked at you!"

"Oh, I don't care for him," muttered Bess.

"Of course you do. He will be one of our teachers."

"That Riggs girl says that none of the girls at the Hall think much of Professor Krenner," grumbled Bess. "They say he's cracked."

"I wouldn't repeat what that Riggs girl says," admonished Nan, with some sharpness. It exasperated her for Bess to show that she had been influenced at all by the rude rich girl.

"Well, I've found out I don't like her," Bess sighed.

"I discovered I didn't, before," Nan rejoined, dryly.

"But she'll tell awful stories about us at Lakeview Hall," Bess said with a worried air.

"Let her tell," scoffed the more sensible Nan.

"We—ell! We don't want to begin school with all the girls against us."

"They'll not be. Do you suppose that girl has much influence with the nice, sensible girls who attend Lakeview Hall?"

"We—ell!" exclaimed Bess, again. "She's rich."

"Bess! I'm astonished at you," declared Nan, with some heat. "Any one to hear you would think you a money-worshipper. How can you bear to be friends with me when my folks are poor."

Bess began to laugh at her. "Poor?" she repeated. "And your dear mother just fallen heir to fifty thousand dollars?"

"Oh—well—I forgot that," returned Nan, meekly. "But I know you loved me before we had any prospect of having money, Bess. Don't let's toady to rich girls when we get to this school. Let's pick our friends by some other standard."

"I guess you're right," agreed her chum. "I've had a lesson. That hateful thing! But if she does tell stories about us to the other girls——"

"We can disprove them by Professor Krenner," added Nan. "Don't worry."

"I don't like him," repeated Bess, pouting.

But Nan did. She was quite sure the instructor with the big, shell-rimmed spectacles, understood girls very well indeed, and that he would be a good friend and a jolly companion if one would allow him to be.

There was that about Professor Krenner that reminded her of her own dear father. They were both given to little, dry jokes; they were both big men, with large, strong hands; and they were both very observant.

How she would get along with the other instructors at Lakeview Hall, and with Dr. Beulah Prescott, herself, Nan did not know; but she felt that she and Professor Krenner would always be good friends.

Nor was she afraid of what Linda might say about her at the Hall. Nan Sherwood was deeply hurt by the girl's arrogance and unkindness; but

she had too large a fund of good sense to be disturbed, as Bess was, over Linda's threatened scandal.

"I don't believe a girl like her really has much influence among other girls—not the right kind of girls, at any rate," Nan thought. "And Bess and I don't want to get in with any other kind."

She was just as eager as she could be, however, to get to Lakeview Hall, and find out what it and the girls were like. Boarding school was an unknown world to Nan. She felt more confidence now in herself, as the train bore her toward the wild Huron shore on which the school stood, than she had when she journeyed up into the Michigan woods with her Uncle Henry, back in mid-winter.

In that past time she was leaving her dear parents and they were leaving her. Each revolution of the car wheels were widening the space between "Momsey" and "Papa Sherwood," and herself. By this time Nan had grown used to their absence. She missed them keenly—she would do that up to the very moment that they again rejoined her; but the pain of their absence was like that of an old wound.

Meanwhile she was determined, was Nan, to render such a report of her school-life to her parents as would make them proud of her.

Nan was not a particularly brilliant girl in her books. She always stood well in her classes because she was a conscientious and a faithful student.

Bess, really, was the quicker and cleverer of the two in their studies.

Nan was very vigorous, and loved play much more heartily than she did her books. Demerits had not often come her way, however, either in grammar school or high school. Mr. Mangel, the Tillbury principal, had felt no hesitancy in viséing Nan's application blank for entrance to the same grade as Bess Harley at Lakeview Hall. Nan, he knew, would not disappoint Dr. Beulah Prescott.

This school that she was going to, Nan knew, would be very different from the public school she had attended heretofore. In the first place, it was a girls' world; there would be neither association with, nor competition with, pupils of the other sex.

Nan was not wholly sure that she would like this phase of her new school life. She liked boys and had always associated with them.

Nan could climb, row, skate, swim, and cut her initials in the bark of a tree without cutting her fingers.

Her vigorous life in the woods during the past six months had stored up within her a greater supply of energy than she had ever before possessed. She had, too, seen men and boys doing really big things in the woods; she had seen courage displayed; she had partaken of adventures herself that called upon her reserves of character, as well as muscle.

Indeed, Nan was quite a different girl in some

respects from the timid, wondering child who had gone away from Tillbury clinging to Uncle Henry's hand. More than ever she felt the protecting instinct stir within her when she saw her chum going wrong. She knew she must assume the burden of looking after Bess Harley in this new world they were entering.

Two hundred girls to compete with! It looked to be such a lot! Lakeview Hall was a very popular institution, and although the building was not originally intended for a school, it answered amply for that purpose—as Professor Krenner told her. One end of the great structure had never been completed; for its builder's ideas had been greater than his resources.

She knew that the castle-like structure standing upon the bluff overlooking Freeling and the troubled waters of Lake Huron, was much too vast for a private dwelling, and that as a summer hotel it had years before signally failed.

Under the executive care of Dr. Beulah Prescott the place had expanded into a large and well-governed school. Nan looked forward with both hope and fear to meeting so many other girls all at the same time.

The cost of tuition at Lakeview precluded the presence of many pupils whose parents were not at least moderately wealthy. In fact, it was a very exclusive school, or "select" as Linda Riggs had

called it during her brief hour of friendship with Bess Harley. Nan devoutly hoped that not many of the other girls would be as "select" as Linda Riggs.

Among the two hundred girls, surely not many could be so purse-proud and arrogant as the railroad magnate's daughter. Nan had not been long enough removed from poverty to feel that she really was rich, nor was it, after all, an enormous fortune. Her mother's money was altogether too new an acquisition to have made much of an impression upon Nan's mind, save to stir her imagination.

She could, and did, imagine a sublimated "dwelling in amity" on the little by-street in Tillbury. She looked forward to the time when she and her parents would be together in their old home; but she could not imagine their style of living changed to any degree.

The life before Nan in the boarding school, however, she realized would be different from anything she had ever experienced. Later, as dusk began to shut down and the switch targets twinkled along the right of way, she peered ahead eagerly for the first sight of the school.

It appeared. Like an old, gray castle on the Rhine, such as she and Bess had read about, the sprawling, huge building was outlined against the sky on which the glories of the sunset were reflected. The little town in the valley was scarcely discernible

save for its twinkling evening lamps; but the Hall stood out boldly on the headland—a silhouette cut out of black cardboard, for not a single lamp shone there.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BOY AT THE STATION

Bess was in a great bustle as the train slowed down for Freeling. She gathered all their possessions, that nothing might be missed this time, and then started for the door with only her shopping-bag and raincoat.

"You're forgetting something, Bess," cried Nan.

"Oh, no!" returned her chum, her eyes opening very wide and very innocently. "Can't be possible. Suit-case, bag, coats, lunch box—I wish you would throw *that* away, Nan! Sure, that's everything."

"Yes. But you forget I'm not a dray-horse," Nan said drily. "Come on and take your share of the load for once."

"Oh! I forgot," murmured Bess, faintly, as Nan proceeded to load her down.

They got out on the platform and the train steamed away. Professor Krenner had disappeared. They did not know that he had remained aboard the train, which stopped at a flag-station a mile up the track—a point nearer to his cabin than Freeling proper.

There were a few bustling passengers in sight,

but none of them were girls. Even Linda Riggs had disappeared.

"What shall we do?" asked Bess, helplessly. "Not a soul to meet us, Nan!"

"Well, you didn't expect all the girls would turn out with a brass band to greet us, did you?" chuckled Nan.

"But surely there must be some means of conveyance to the Hall!"

"Shank's mare, maybe," returned her cheerful chum.

"You can laugh!" cried Bess, as though she considered Nan's serenity a fault. "But I don't want to climb away up that hill to-night in the dark, and with this heavy old suit-case."

"Quite right. That would be too big a premium placed upon education," laughed Nan. "Let us ask."

A man with a visored cap who was hurrying past at this juncture, was halted and questioned.

"'Bus for the Hall? Yes, Miss. Just the other side of the station if it hasn't already gone," he said.

"There! we've lost it," complained Bess, starting on a run.

"Impossible! How could we lose it when we never have had it?"

"Oh, you can be funny——"

They rounded the corner of the station just as a

pair of slowly-moving horses attached to a big, lurching omnibus, were starting forward. The man driving them leaned down from the seat, speaking to somebody inside the 'bus.

"Sure there ain't no more of you to-night, Miss?" he asked. "Dr. Prescott said——"

"I know there's no more of me, Charley," Miss Linda Rigg's voice interrupted tartly. "And if you don't hurry along you won't get your usual tip, I can tell you *that*!"

"Oh!" murmured Bess, hanging back.

"She's trying to run away with the school 'bus," declared Nan, in some anger. "Now, she sha'n't do that, Bess!"

"Let her go," begged Bess. "I don't want to ride with her."

"Pshaw! I'm not dying for her company, either," Nan confessed. "But I want to get up to that Hall to-night."

The omnibus had completely turned around, heading away from the station.

"Hi, there!" cried Nan.

"Drive on, Charley," commanded Linda Riggs, loudly.

The 'bus driver evidently did not hear Nan's call. The latter dropped her bag and tossed her own coat to Bess.

"I'm not going to let him get away from us," she cried.

But Bess seized her arm. "Oh, don't! Let's not have another quarrel with that Riggs girl right here."

"Dear me! I haven't quarreled with her at all, yet," said Nan, somewhat amused.

"She's—so—mean," began Bess, when Nan interrupted:

"Well! we'll just beat her to it at that!"

"Oh, how, Nan?"

"We'll get there first."

"But, *how*?" asked her chum again.

Several automobiles were standing beside the platform and Nan swiftly approached the driver of the nearest one.

"Do you know how to get to Lakeview Hall?" she asked of this person.

"Why—yes," he said. "Of course."

Nan saw that he was only a young boy; but he wore gauntlets, had goggles attached to his cap, and was evidently old enough to drive the car.

"Can you take us up there?" Nan asked.

"Why—yes," again rather doubtfully.

"Come on, Bess!" called Nan, with satisfaction. "We'll beat that Linda Riggs after all."

"Oh, I say!" murmured the youthful automobile driver.

But Nan paid little attention to him. Having engaged him for the trip she hustled Bess and the

baggage into his car without another word to him. Finally she leaped in, too, and banged the door of the tonneau.

"There! we're all ready," she said to the boy.

"Oh—well—if you say so," he murmured, and obediently cranked up and then stepped into the car himself.

"Say!" whispered Nan to Bess. "He's an awfully slow thing, isn't he? I don't see how he makes any money tooling people around in this auto."

"What's bothering *me*," whispered Bess, "is how we're going to pay him? I haven't but twenty cents left. You know I bought candy on the train, beside that lunch."

"Not having wasted my money in riotous living," laughed Nan, "I can pay him all right."

The automobile whisked through the streets of the lower town in a few moments. They passed the lumbering 'bus with a scornful toot of the horn. In the suburbs they went even faster, although they were climbing the bluff all the time.

Lakeview Hall was alight now, and as they approached it between the great granite posts at the foot of the private driveway it looked more friendly.

A honk of the automobile-horn in notification of their approach, and immediately the cluster of incandescent lights under the reflector on the great

front porch blazed into life. The wide entrance to the Hall, and all the vicinity, was radiantly illumined.

"Goodness!" ejaculated Nan. I guess they do meet us with a brass band!"

For, with shouts of welcome, and a great flutter of frocks and ribbons, a troop of girls ran out of the Hall to welcome the newcomers.

"Here she is, girls!"

"Walter's the boy to do an errand right!"

"Weren't we the thoughtful bunch to send him after you?"

"Hey, Linda!" we're going to have the same old room, Mrs. Cupp says."

The automobile came to a stop. The boy driver drawled:

"Some mistake, girls. I didn't see Linda Riggs at all. But here's a couple of new ones."

Bess had uttered a horrified gasp; but Nan was almost convulsed with laughter. She could usually appreciate the funny side of any situation; and to her mind this most certainly was funny!

It was plain that Linda Riggs was popular enough with some of her schoolmates to have them welcome her with special éclat. They had engaged this boy with the automobile to meet her at the station.

In place of Linda, arriving in the motor car, Nan and Bess had usurped her place; while even

now the old 'bus was rumbling up the driveway with Linda inside.

"Goodness! who can they be?" remarked one of the girls, staring at Nan and Bess.

The former was quite composed as, with her own and Bess Harley's possessions about her on the lower of the four broad steps leading up to the veranda, she drew out her purse to pay the boy for the trip from the station.

"How much?" she asked him, without observing the surprised group in her rear.

"Why—I—— It's nothing," stammered the young chauffeur.

"Oh, yes it is!" exclaimed Nan. "Of course you have some regular charge—even if you were not there at the station just to meet *us*."

"No—o, I don't," he declared. "There's nothing to pay."

"But there *must* be!" cried Nan, a little wildly. "Surely you run a public car?"

"No. This is my father's car," admitted the boy, whom Nan now saw was a very good looking boy and very well dressed. "I was just down there to meet a friend——"

"Yes, and I don't see how you missed her, Walter," interrupted the girl behind Nan, and who had spoken before. "For here is Linda now, in Charley's old 'bus."

"Oh my!" murmured Bess.

Nan began to feel great confusion herself. It was not so funny, after all!

"Why—why, then you do *not* have this car for hire?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," said the boy, meekly. He was looking at Nan Sherwood admiringly, for she made a very pretty picture standing there in the strong glow of the electric light. "But I didn't mind bringing you up—not at all."

"Oh!" gasped Nan.

"You are an awful chump, Walter," observed the girl who had spoken before. "Grace said you could do an errand right; but it seems you're quite as big a dunce as your sister."

"Grace is not a dunce, Cora Courtney!" exclaimed the boy, with some show of spirit, as he started his car, not having shut off his engine. "Good night," he said to Nan, and was gone around the curve of the drive as Charley brought his lazy horses to a halt before the door.

"Here I am, girls!" cried Linda Riggs, putting her head out of the 'bus window. Then she saw Nan and Bess standing on the steps of the portico, and she demanded involuntarily:

"How did those two girls get here ahead of me?"

CHAPTER IX

THE RED-HAIRED GIRL

"WELL! I must say it's a good joke on you, Linda," said the tall girl, called Cora Courtney, in response to Miss Riggs' observation.

"What do you mean?" snapped the railroad magnate's daughter.

"Why, they came up from the station in the auto we girls sent after you. You know it's against the rules for us to go down into the town so late, so we couldn't send a delegation for you; but that little Grace Mason said her brother would bring you up."

"Walter Mason!" exclaimed Linda, hopping out of the old 'bus. "Is that who was driving that car?"

"Yes. That was Walter. And Walter is as big a dunce as his sister," declared Cora, crossly. "He went right by you and brought up these two girls."

Linda's face was very much flushed. That she had overreached herself in this matter, taught the obstinate girl nothing. She had deliberately misinformed the 'bus driver, when she told him there

were no other girls on the train, and had hurried him away from the station.

So she had overlooked Walter Mason and his car, and the boy had not seen her. Her scowl as she looked upon the now calm Nan and the almost petrified Bess, did not improve Linda's personal appearance.

"Oh! I am not surprised at anything *those* two do," scoffed the rich girl, loftily.

"Hullo!" exclaimed Cora. "They don't seem to have done anything except to get a free ride."

"Indeed, that is just it!" cried Linda, with a toss of her head. "Anything *free* is just what they are looking for. One of them let me pay for her lunch on the train. And the other——"

"Girls!"

The voice, very mellow and sweet (it reminded Nan Sherwood of her mother's own in its soft cadence) seemed to quell all harsher sounds instantly—the sharp voice of Linda, even the querulous notes of the katydids in the grove before the Hall, and the strident tones of the crickets.

"Girls!"

Nan flashed a glance up the steps. There had softly swept to the break of the short flight, a lovely lady in trailing robes, gray bands of hair smoothed over her ears, gray eyes as luminous as stars; and only the soft lace at the low-cut neck of her gown

to divide its gray shade from the softly pink complexion of Dr. Beulah Prescott.

"She's beautiful," breathed Nan in her chum's ear.

"Girls!" then said the preceptress of Lakeview Hall again. "The supper gong is sounding. Bring the new arrivals in. They may have ten minutes in the lavatory on this floor before appearing at table."

"How do you do, Linda? I hope you are quite well. And these are two of our new girls?"

Nan and Bess had picked up their possessions and now mounted the steps hesitatingly.

"Come right here, my dears," said Dr. Prescott, holding out a slim, beautifully white hand on which there was no jewel. "It must be that you are the two friends from Tillbury, who were to arrive by this train."

"Yes, Ma'am," Nan said.

"You are Nancy Sherwood?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"And this other is Elizabeth Harley?" pursued Dr. Prescott, shaking hands with them both.

Bess began to breathe more freely. It was one thing to face Linda Riggs down in the train; but in the presence of all these girls who knew her and did not know the newcomers—bold Elizabeth found her pluck oozing rapidly away.

Dr. Prescott beckoned to one girl of the group, and said: "Play hostess in my stead, Laura, please. This is Laura Polk, Nancy and Elizabeth. She will show you where to freshen up a bit before supper, and lead you to the dining hall, as well. Owing to the delay of the workmen in making some repairs, we are still in some confusion, but you will be assigned to your rooms before supper is over. I hope you will be very happy with us."

She patted Nan's shoulder, put her arm for a moment around Bess, and then floated—rather than walked—away. Nan had never seen anybody so graceful of carriage as this lady. Even "Momsey," whom she worshipped, could not cross a room as did the preceptress of Lakeview Hall.

The girl whom she had introduced to the two friends, Laura Polk, was a smiling, freckled girl, with a fiery thatch of hair. It was not bronze, or red-gold, or any other fashionable color. It was just plain, unmistakable red—nothing else.

She seemed to be a very pleasant girl. What Linda Riggs had said about Nan and Bess in her hearing made no impression on Laura.

"Come on, lambkins," she said. "I wager you feel all cinders and smutch after such a long ride in the cars."

"We do," Nan agreed fervently.

"'Way from Chicago?"

"Yes," said Bess, finding her voice.

"I came up myself day-before-yesterday," said Laura. "I know what it is."

She led the way through the great entrance hall and down a side passage to the tiled and enameled lavatory. Even Bess was impressed by the elegance of the furnishings. The rugs were handsome, the carpets soft, thick pile, the hangings richly decorative. Nan, of course, had never seen anything like it.

"What a delightful place," Bess said to her chum. "And such good taste in the decorating."

"Hope the supper will taste just as good," Nan returned grimly. "I'm hungry in spite of the lunch I ate. You spoiled your appetite with tea and candy."

"I didn't suppose there was anything left for me in that old box when you got through," sniffed Bess.

"Oh, yes there was—and is," laughed Nan. "It's good, too."

"Oh, girls!" broke in their red-headed guide. "Have you really part of your train lunch left?"

"Yes," said Nan, shyly.

"Is it in that box?" asked Laura Polk, quickly.

"Yes."

"Then hang onto it, do!" begged Laura.

Nan and Bess looked at each other wonderingly, and then both of them questioningly at Laura.

"Oh, you'll be glad of my advice—probably this

very night. Dr. Beulah doesn't approve of us girls eating between meals, and the girl that manages to sneak a bite up to her room to eat at bedtime is lucky, indeed," Laura declared, quite seriously. "I tell you, I have sometimes lain for hours in the throes of starvation because I didn't have even a cracker."

"Goodness!" gasped Bess. "I should think you would take up something from the supper table."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Laura, hollowly. "Wait till you have seen the supper table."

"What do you mean?" queried Nan, curiously.

"You see all this luxury about you," proclaimed the red-haired girl, solemnly. "You beheld the magnificence of the main hall as you came in. And it extends to Dr. Beulah's apartments, which are downstairs here, on the right of the main door.

"But when you turn the other way," continued Laura, "and approach the chaste and nunnery-like rooms devoted to the uses of 'us young ladies,' as Mrs. Cupp calls us, you will at once and immediately be struck, stroke, and stricken with the vast and monstrous difference between our part of the castle and Dr. Beulah's.

"Oh!" cried this extravagantly speaking girl, "Dr. Beulah has her course dinner at night, carried in by black Susan on a mighty tray. I have often thought that it would be a great lark to catch Susan in the back hall, blindfold her, threaten her

with the boathouse ghost if she squealed, and bear off the doctor's dinner as the spoils of the campaign."

"But goodness me!" cried Nan, when she could speak for laughter. "Don't they really give you enough supper?"

"Wait! Only wait!" repeated Laura, warmly. "You'll soon see. Dr. Beulah believes most thoroughly in 'the simple life'—for us girls. Oh, she do—believe me! And I think Mrs. Cupp even counts the crackers that go on each dish that is set on the table at supper time.

"Sometimes we have crackers and milk for supper," added Laura, dropping her voice to the tone of one telling a ghost story at midnight. Then in a still more ghost-like voice she repeated: "Sometimes we have crackers and milk. The lacteal fluid is usually twice skimmed, first for the teachers' table (they have cream in their coffee in the morning), secondly for the thin, anæmic fluid we get on our oatmeal. But, anyhow, it is milk.

"There are never more than seven crackers on a plate—just seven, the perfect number," sighed this hyperbolical girl. "I've counted them again and again. Why seven, and not six, or eight, deponent knoweth not. I think Mrs. Cupp counts them out that way for some fell purpose of her own," went on Laura, reflectively. "She must have the crackers all numbered and she deals 'em around as in a game

at cards. Anyhow, I tried a trick once and it didn't work, so I believe she has them numbered."

"What did you do?" asked wide-eyed Bess.

"The girl next to me didn't appear at supper. I took her crackers and slipped them down my stocking. But Mrs. Cupp caught me before I got out of the room, took me to her den, and made me disgorge the booty——"

A mellow gong clanged through the building. Nan and Bess, who were now almost convulsed by their new friend's remarks, had managed to make some sort of a toilet.

"Come on!" whispered the red-haired girl, hoarsely. "Never mind your bags and wraps. *They* will be perfectly safe on that settee. But hang onto the lunch box. If Mrs. Cupp finds *that* she will confiscate its contents, I assure you."

She thrust the box into Bess' hands and drove both the new girls before her, like a fussy hen with two chickens.

CHAPTER X

A FAMOUS INTRODUCTION

The girls crowded into the dining hall from all directions. Nan and Bess were told that there were many who had not yet arrived; but to the two strangers from Tillbury it seemed as though there was a great throng.

The curious glances flung at Nan and her chum confused them, the buzz of conversation added to their embarrassment, and had it not been for the red-haired girl, Laura Polk, they would have been tempted to turn and flee. They were quickly shown to seats, however, at a table where every seat was filled with laughing, chattering girls. As the school was not yet fully organized for work, there was no person in authority to take the head of the table. Nan and Bess were glad to note that their acquaintance, the red-haired girl, was with them. Bess was under the embarrassing necessity of holding the lunch box in her lap.

"Hullo, Laura!" whispered one mischievous girl from across the table. "I thought you were going to have your hair dyed this vacation?"

"So I did," declared Miss Polk gravely.

"Well! I must say it didn't seem to do it any good," was the next observation.

"That's just it," said the serious, red-haired girl. "The dye didn't take."

"I really do wonder, Laura," said another of her schoolmates, "how your hair ever came to be such a very reddish red."

"I had scarlet fever when I was very young," said Miss Polk, promptly, "and it settled in my hair."

The smothered laughter over this had scarcely subsided when another girl asked: "Say, Polk! what's your new chum, there, got in her lap?"

This pointed question was aimed at Bess, who blushed furiously. Laura remained as grave as a judge, and explained:

"Why, it's her lunch. She seems to be afraid she won't get supper enough here and has brought reinforcements."

The laughter that went up at this sally drew the attention of many sitting near to that table. Bess Harley's eyes filled with angry tears. She saw that the red-haired girl had set a trap for her, and she had walked right into it.

Bess really had feared she would not have supper enough. Having refused to eat out of the lunch box on the train, her appetite had now begun unmistakably to manifest itself. If the usual supper served the pupils of Lakeview Hall was as scanty

as Laura Polk had intimated, the remains of the lunch Bess' mother had bought for the two chums in Chicago would be very welcome indeed.

A glance around the table, however, soon assured even unobservant Bess that the red-haired girl was letting her tongue run idly when she criticised the food served. There were heaps of bread and biscuit, plenty of golden butter, and a pitcher of milk that had *not* been twice skimmed, beside each plate. Besides, there were apple sauce and sliced peaches and cold meat in abundance. The supper was plain, but plentiful enough, considering that Dr. Prescott believed in giving her girls their hearty meal at noon.

Nan had at once suspected that Laura Polk was joking. But, even she had not appreciated the fact that the red-haired girl was deliberately laying a trap for them until the subject of the lunch box was brought up. Nan whispered quickly to Bess:

"Laugh! laugh! Laugh with them, instead of letting them laugh at you!"

But Bess could not do that. She was very angry. And as soon as these fun-loving girls saw she had lost her temper, they kept the joke up.

Bess angrily allowed the lunch box to fall to the floor under the table. But, as the meal progressed, gradually almost every dish on the table gravitated toward Bess' plate.

"Want any more of your apple sauce, Cora?" the

question would be raised, quite gravely. "No? Well do pass it this way, we're hungry over here," and the half-eaten apple sauce would appear at Bess Harley's elbow.

Her plate was soon ringed about with pitchers of milk, half-empty butter plates, broken biscuits, dabs of peaches and apple sauce in lonely-looking saucers. Nan was almost choked with a desire to laugh; and yet she was sorry for her chum, too. If Bess had only been able to take the joke in good part!

"Don't show that you are so disturbed by their fun," begged Nan of her friend.

"Fun! I'll write my mother and have her take me away from here," muttered Bess, in a rage. "Why, these girls are all *beasts!*"

"Hush, honey! don't make it worse than it already is," advised sensible Nan. "The madder you get the more they will enjoy teasing you."

A rather severe and plainly dressed woman, wearing spectacles, who had been walking about among the tables, now came to the one where Nan and Bess were seated. She looked somewhat suspiciously at the dishes pushed so close to Bess Harley's plate; but all the girls at the table were as sober as they could be.

"Dr. Prescott tells me you are the two girls from Tillbury," she said to Nan.

"Yes," was the reply. "My friend is Bess Harley and I am Nan Sherwood."

"We are glad to have you with us, and you have been assigned to Number Seven, Corridor Four. Your trunks will be unpacked in the trunk room in the basement to-morrow." Then she flashed another glance at the array of dishes before Bess.

"What is the meaning of this?" she demanded.

"I—I——" Bess stammered, and some of the girls gave suppressed giggles.

Laura Polk soberly came to her rescue—or appeared to.

"This is her birthday, and all the girls have been giving her presents. At least, that is the way I understand it."

Irrepressible laughter broke out around the table. Even Mrs. Cupp smiled grimly.

"I fancy you started the birthday presentation, Laura," she said. "Let us have no more of it."

When she had passed along Laura Polk leaned forward to whisper shrilly across Nan to Bess:

"Have a care, Bess! I think Mrs. Cupp suspects you. Don't try to smuggle any of that apple sauce up to Room Seven, Corridor Four, in your stocking!"

Of course this was all very ridiculous, and, taken in the right spirit, the introduction of Nan Sherwood's chum to Lakeview Hall, would not have been so bad. This was really a mild initiation to the fraternal companionship of a lot of gay, fun-loving girls.

But Bess had a high sense of her own dignity. At home, in Tillbury, because her father was an influential man, and her family of some local importance, nobody had ever treated her in this way. To be an object of the ridicule of strangers is a hard trial at best. Just then, to Bess' mind, it seemed as though her whole school life at Lakeview Hall must be spoiled by this opening incident.

Nan felt for her friend, for she well knew how sensitive Bess was. But she knew this was all in fun. She could not help but be amused by the red-haired girl's jokes. There wasn't a scrap of harm in anything the exuberant one did or said. There was no meanness in Laura Polk. She was not like Linda Riggs.

Had it not been for Nan, Bess would never have found her way to Room Seven, Corridor Four, she was so blinded with angry tears. The room they were to occupy together was up two flights of broad stairs, and had a wide window overlooking the lake. Nan knew this to be the fact at once, for she went to the open window, heard the soughing of the uneasy waves on the pebbly beach far below, and saw the red, winking eye of the lighthouse at the mouth of Freeling Inlet.

"This is a lovely room, Bess," she declared, as she snapped on the electric light.

Bess banged the door viciously. "I don't care how nice it is! I sha'n't stay here!" she cried.

"Oh, pshaw, Bess! you don't mean that," returned Nan.

"Yes, I do—so now! I won't remain to be insulted by these girls! My mother won't want me to. I shall write her——"

"You *wouldn't*?" cried Nan, in horror.

"Why wouldn't I?"

"You don't mean to say you would trouble and worry your mother about such a thing, just as soon as you get here?"

"We—ell!"

"I wouldn't do that for anything," Nan urged. "And, besides, I don't think the girls meant any real harm."

"That homely, red-headed Polk girl is just as mean as she can be!"

"But she has to take jokes herself about her red hair."

"I don't care!" grumbled Bess. "She has no right to play such mean tricks on *me*. Why did she tell me to take that horrid old lunch box in to supper?"

"Because she foresaw just what would happen," chuckled Nan.

"Oh! you can laugh!" cried Bess.

"We should not have been so gullible," Nan declared. "That was a perfectly ridiculous story Laura told us about the food being so poor and scanty, and we should not have believed it."

Bess was staring at her with angry sparks in her eyes. She suddenly burst out with:

"That old lunch box! If it hadn't been for you, Nan Sherwood, we would not have brought it here with us."

"Why—— Is that quite right, Bess?" gently suggested Nan.

"Yes, it is!" snapped her chum. "If you had taken my advice you would have flung it out of the window and eaten in the dining car in a proper manner."

There were a good many retorts Nan might have made. She wanted to laugh, too. It did seem so ridiculous for Bess to carry on so over a silly joke. She was making a mountain out of a mole-hill.

But it would be worse than useless to argue the point, and to laugh would surely make her chum more bitter—perhaps open a real breach between them that not even time could heal.

So Nan, in her own inimitable, loving way, put both arms suddenly about Bess and kissed her. "I'm awfully sorry, dear; forgive me," she said, just as though the fault was all hers.

Bess broke down and wet Nan's shoulder with her angry tears. But they were a relief. She sobbed out at last:

"I hope I'll never, *never* see a shoe-box lunch again! I just do——"

To interrupt her came a solemn summons on the door of Number Seven—*rap, rap, rap!* The two newcomers to Lakeview Hall looked at each other, startled.

CHAPTER XI

THE PROCESSION OF THE SAWNEYS

"Goodness! what can that be?" demanded Nan.

Rap! rap! rap! the knock was repeated.

"Did you lock that door, Bess?" exclaimed Nan.

Before her chum could answer, the knob was turned and the door swung slowly open. Several figures crowded about the opening portal. It was no summons by one of the teachers, as Nan and Bess had expected. The first figure that appeared clearly to the startled vision of the two chums was rather appalling.

It was a tall girl with a pillow case drawn over her head and shoulders. Her arms were thrust through two holes in the sides and she could see through two smaller holes burned in the pillow case. She leaned on a broom, the brush part of which was also covered with white muslin. Upon this background was drawn a horned owl in charcoal.

This horned owl was no more solemn than were the girls themselves who came filing in behind their leader. They came in two by two and circled

around the work table which was set across the room at the foot of the two beds. The second couple bore a big tea-tray and on that tray reposed —*the forgotten lunch box Bess had dropped under the supper table!*

Poor Bess uttered a horrified gasp; Nan came near disgracing herself in her chum's eyes forever, by exploding into laughter. There was a faint giggle from some hysterical girl down the line and the leader rapped smartly upon the floor with the handle of the decorated broom.

"Ladies!" ejaculated the leader, her voice somewhat muffled behind the pillowslip.

"Votes for women!" was the faint response from somewhere in the line.

"Silence in the ranks!" exclaimed Laura Polk, snatching the tin tray away from her partner and banging on it with her fist. The lunch box, decorated with a soiled bow of violet ribbon, had been placed on the table.

"Ladies!" repeated the girl behind the mask. "We have with us to-night, in our very midst, as it were, two sawneys who should be initiated into all the rites and mysteries of Lakeview Hall."

"Hear! hear!" sepulchrally came from the red-haired girl.

"You'd better keep still, too, Laura," admonished another girl.

"Oh! very well!" answered Laura.

"These sawneys must be taught their place," pursued the leader of the gay company.

The term "sawney" in the lumber camps and upon the Great Lakes, means tyro, or novice. These girls had picked up the phrase from their brothers, without doubt. Bess thought it a particularly objectionable name.

"First of all," said the girl in the pillowslip, "they must join our procession and march as shall be directed. Fall in, sawneys, behind the first two guards. Refuse at your peril!"

Nan's mind was already made up. This was only fun—it was a great game of ridicule. To refuse to join in the sport would mark her and Bess for further, and future, punishment.

Before her chum could object, Nan seized her and ran her right into line ahead of the red-haired girl and her companion.

"Ready! March!" commanded the masked girl.

"Hold on!" objected Laura Polk. These two sawneys ought to be made to eat their lunch."

Bess fairly snorted, she was so angry. But Nan would not let her pull away. She cried, before her chum could say anything:

"Oh! we promise to eat it all before we go to bed."

"That will do," declared the leader. "Be still, Polk. March!"

Against her will at first, then because she did not

know what else to do, Bess Harley went along beside her chum. "The Procession of the Sawneys" —quite a famous institution, by the way, at Lakeview Hall—was begun.

"Where's the next innocent?" demanded one girl, hoarsely.

"Number Eighteen, on this corridor," was the reply. "That girl from Wauhegan."

"Wau—what-again?" sputtered Laura Polk.

"There, there, Polk!" admonished the masked leader. "Never mind your bad puns. Here we are. Attention!"

The procession halted. The leader banged the door three times as she had at Number Seven, with the handle of the broom.

"Come in! don't stop to knock," called somebody inside.

"There! that's the way to treat us," grunted Laura, as the door swung inward.

"Sh!" the girls all became silent.

"There was a light in the room and a tall, thin girl, with rather homely features but a beautiful set of teeth, scrambled up from the floor where she had been sitting cross-legged, arranging her lower bureau drawer.

"Gracious—goodness—Agnes!" she gasped, when she saw the head of the procession.

Then silence fell again—that is, human voices ceased. But the visiting girls marked instantly the

peculiar fact that the room sounded like a clock-shop, with all the clocks going.

There was an alarm clock hung by a ribbon right beside the head of one of the two beds in the room. A little ormolu clock was ticking busily on the bureau, and an easel clock stood upon the work table. In the corner hung an old-fashioned cuckoo clock in one of the elaborately carved cases made in the Black Forest, and just at this moment the door at the top flew open and the Cuckoo jerked her head out and announced the time—nine o'clock.

This was too much for the risibility of the girls crowding in at the door, and no pounding of the broom handle could entirely quell the giggles.

"And she's wearing a watch!" gasped one girl. "And there's another hanging on the side of the mirror."

"Why, girls!" burst out Laura Polk. "We've certainly caught Miss Procrastination herself. You know, 'procrastination is the thief of time,' and this Wau—what-again girl must have stolen all these timepieces."

"Didn't either!" declared the occupant of the room. "Pop and I took 'em for a debt."

"Hush!" commanded the girl in the pillow case. "What is your name, sawney?"

"Amelia Boggs," was the prompt reply.

"Amelia, you must come with us," commanded the leader of the sawney procession.

"Oh! I haven't time," objected the victim.

There was another outburst of laughter at this.

"Let her take her time with her," Laura declared; and they proceeded to hang the alarm clock around Miss Boggs' neck, the ormolu on one arm and the table clock on the other. Both watches were pinned prominently on her chest, and thus adorned, the girl from Wauhegan was added to the procession.

It had certainly become a merry one by this time. Even Bess discovered that this sort of fun was all a good-natured play. She could not laugh at others and remain sullen herself; so her sky gradually cleared.

At the next door behind which a "sawney" lurked, instead of knocking, the leader set off the alarm-clock. It was a sturdy, loud-voiced alarm, and it buzzed and rattled vigorously.

The two girls inside, both the new one and the sophomore whose room she was to share, rushed to the door at this terrible din. This initiate was a little, fluffy, flaxen-haired, pink and white girl, of a very timid disposition. She had been put to room with Grace Mason, of whom Nan and Bess had heard before.

Nan was particularly interested in Grace, who seemed to be of a very retiring disposition, and was very pretty. But her new room-mate was even more timid. She at once burst into tears when she saw the crowd of strange girls, having been

told that the girls of Lakeview Hall hazed all strangers unmercifully.

The visiting party tied a pillow case on the flaxen-haired girl for a bib, and made her carry a towel in each hand for handkerchiefs. One girl carried a pail and bath sponge, and the procession halted at frequent intervals while imaginary pools of tears were sponged up from the floor before the victim's feet.

The procession might have continued indefinitely had not Mrs. Cupp appeared at ten o'clock and put a stop to it.

"You're over time, young ladies, half an hour," she said in her abrupt way. "A bad example to the new pupils, and to your juniors. Postpone any more of this till to-morrow night. To your rooms!"

They scattered to their rooms. Mrs. Cupp's word was law. She was Dr. Prescott's first assistant, and had the interior management of the school in her very capable hands. There was nothing very motherly or comforting about Mrs. Cupp. But Nan decided that Mrs. Cupp was not really wholly unsympathetic after all.

Nan and Bess hurried back to Number Seven, Corridor Four. All Bess' anger and tears had evaporated, and she was full of talk and laughter. Moreover, she and Nan ate every crumb of the shoe-box lunch before they went to bed!

CHAPTER XII

EVERYTHING NEW

LESSONS were not taken up for several days after Nan Sherwood and Bess Harley arrived at Lakeview Hall. This gave them an opportunity for getting acquainted with the other girls and their strange surroundings, as well as the routine of the school.

At this time of the year the rising bell was at six and breakfast at seven. The girls could either spend the hour before breakfast in study or out-of-door recreation. The grounds connected with the Hall comprised all the plateau at the top of the bluff, with a mile of shore at its foot. At one place a roughly built, crooked flight of steps all the way down the face of the bluff, offered a path to the boathouse. By day that sprawling stone building was merely a place to shelter the school's many boats, and a boatkeeper was on hand to attend to the girls' needs. But at night, so it was whispered, the boathouse had a ghostly occupant.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Nan Sherwood, with laughter, when she was told this. "What kind of a ghost?"

"A black ghost—all black," declared May Winslow, who seemed to be of a rather superstitious nature.

"You mean the ghost of a colored man?" demanded Nan.

"Oh! nobody ever saw his face. But he's all in black," Miss Winslow stated.

"Well! that's a novelty, at least," chuckled Nan. "Usually ghosts are sheeted in white, with phosphorescent eyes and clammy hands."

"Goodness!" gasped May. "Nobody ever got near enough to him to let him touch her! I should say not!"

"And why should he haunt that boathouse?" was Nan's further demand.

"Oh! we don't know that."

"Ever been a murder committed there?"

"Why! how you talk! A murder at Lakeview Hall? The idea!"

"All the ghosts I ever heard of were supposed to be the disembodied spirits either of persons who met with some catastrophe, or who committed a capital crime. They usually haunt the spot where the tragedy occurred. Now, my dear, what did this poor, black ghost do in life that he has to haunt that boathouse?"

"Oh, you can laugh!" exclaimed May, rather offended. "But if you ever see the ghost you won't be so light-minded about it."

And, oddly enough, May Winslow was a true prophet in this case; but Nan Sherwood, at the time, only laughed.

She and Bess, on the morning following their arrival at the school, went down to the trunk room to get their possessions. Mrs. Cupp abrogated to herself the right of search for, and seizure of, all contraband goods brought to the school by the pupils. The trunks must be unpacked under her eye —and a watchful eye it was!

Many a foolish or unwise mother allowed her daughter to wear garments or articles of adornment that Mrs. Cupp did not approve. And, as has before been said, at Lakeview Hall Mrs. Cupp's will was law.

"No, Miss Annie, I told you last year that those low-cut garments were not fit for winter wear in this climate. You should have told your aunt that I disapproved."

"I *did*," snapped the black-eyed girl who was thus addressed. "But auntie says she has worn them all her life, and there is no reason why I should not."

"Oh, yes there is. I am the reason," returned Mrs. Cupp, grimly. "Leave those things in your trunk, or return them. And tell your aunt that if she does not send you suitable and warm undergarments for the winter, that I will buy them and the cost will appear upon your quarterly bill.

"Now, Lettie Roberts! you know very well that no girl can wear a heel on her shoes like that in this school. What would Miss Gleason say?" Miss Gleason was the physical instructor. "If you wish to retain those shoes I will have the heels lowered."

"Oh, mercy me, Mrs. Cupp!" remonstrated the victim this time. "Those are my brand new dancing pumps!"

"You'll not dance in these pumps here," responded the matron, firmly. "Make up your mind quickly."

"Heel 'em!" shot in Lettie, who knew of old that Mrs. Cupp was adamant. "Oh, dear!"

"No use trying to balk Mrs. Cupp," Laura Polk had warned Nan and Bess. "It would be just as wise to butt your heads against a brick wall to make an impression on the wall!"

Mrs. Cupp had a sharp eye for anything the girls desired to take out of their trunks. And that which went back into the trunks remained in her care, for she insisted upon keeping the trunk keys as well as the key of the trunk-room.

"What's this you have buried at the bottom of your trunk, Nancy?" she asked Nan, sharply, when she came to a long, narrow box, made very neatly of cabinet wood by the skilful fingers of Tom Sherwood.

"Mercy, Nan!" whispered Bess, peering over her

chum's shoulder, "it looks horribly like a baby's coffin."

"I—I'd rather you didn't take that out, Mrs. Cupp," said Nan, hastily.

"What?" repeated the lady, eyeing Nan suspiciously through her glasses.

"No, ma'am! please don't take it out," fluttered Nan.

"You wish to let it remain in my care, then, do you?" asked Mrs. Cupp, drily.

"Ye—yes, ma'am," Nan murmured.

Bess' eyes were big with wonder. Her chum had a secret that was not known to her!

Some of the other girls were listeners, too. Linda Riggs was impatiently awaiting her turn to have Mrs. Cupp examine the contents of her trunk. She tossed her head and said, in scarcely a muffled tone, to Cora Courtney:

"That Sherwood girl has probably succeeded in taking something and hiding it in her trunk. I told you, Cora, how she came so near getting away with my new bag when I was not looking."

"Why, her bag is just like yours, Linda," said Cora.

"Nonsense! They're not alike, at all," cried the ill-natured Linda. "She couldn't afford to own such a bag honestly. Mine cost nearly forty dollars."

"Well, maybe the Sherwood girl has more mon-y

than we think," whispered Cora. "I saw her give Mrs. Cupp some bank notes to take care of."

"Stolen!" exclaimed Linda.

"Well, she has them, at least," said Cora, who was poor herself but loved money, and was always making friends with richer girls that she might share in their spending money. "You know, we want to have some bang-up banquets this fall, and parties and the like. Somebody's got to furnish the 'sinews of war'—and you can't do it all, Linda. Better make friends with Sherwood."

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" cried Linda.

But Cora was a crafty girl. She herself said nothing and did nothing to offend Nan or Bess. It became common report, however, that Nan Sherwood had something in her trunk of which she would rather go without the use than show to Mrs. Cupp. And, of course, that aroused general curiosity.

Bess, on her part, felt not a little hurt. She was sure there was nothing she would not tell or show Nan. She did not speak of the matter to her chum, for Nan pointedly avoided it. But it troubled Bess, when the other girls tried to pump her about the box in Nan's trunk, that she was unable to look knowing and refuse to tell.

"I don't know anything about it," she snapped. "She doesn't tell me her secrets."

"Ho!" cried Laura. "What's the use of being

chums with a girl who locks up the innermost recesses of her heart against you—and her trunk, as well? Why! I and my chum even borrow each other's chewing gum!" she added with her usual exaggeration.

Nan, however, would not be offended at anything Bess said, and was so helpful and kind that her chum could not long retain even a shadow of unfriendliness. During the first days of school the two friends from Tillbury gathered a number of girls about them; some novices like themselves; others, girls of about their own age who had spent from one to three terms at the Hall previous to this fall semester.

Laura Polk, the red-haired joker, was on the same corridor as Nan and Bess, so naturally they saw a good deal of her. And she was always good fun.

Grace Mason and her room-mate, flaxen-haired Lillie Nevin, were two more who soon took shelter under Nan Sherwood's wing. The more boisterous girls harassed Grace and Lillie at times, and yet they courted them, too, for Grace's parents and brother lived on the outskirts of Freeling and she could communicate through Walter much more easily with the outside world than could many of her schoolmates.

Then there was "Procrastination Boggs," as the queer girl from Wauhegan had been nicknamed.

She joined forces with the girls of Number Seven, Corridor Four, right at the start.

Nan and Bess, in fact, found themselves in a very busy world indeed. Lessons, study, gymnasium work, boating, walking, tennis, basket-ball, and a dozen other activities, occupied their days. And sometimes at night,—even after the solemn tolling of the half-past nine curfew,—slippered feet ran about the dim corridors with as little noise as the mice made behind the wainscoting. Bands of whispering, giggling girls gathered in the various rooms and told stories, played games, held bare-foot dances, and ate goodies, when they were supposed to be deeply engaged in the preparation of the morrow's work, or long after they should have retired.

Nan was careful to break no important rules, nor did she allow careless Bess to fall into the company of girls who broke them. Of innocent amusement there was plenty at Lakeview Hall.

Both chums were fond of boating and other aquatic sports. Lake Huron, of course, was entirely different from the millpond at home; but they knew how to row and paddle, and there were plenty of boats and canoes to use here, for the asking.

And it was because of their delight in paddling a canoe that Nan Sherwood and Bess Harley first fell into a real adventure at Lakeview Hall.

CHAPTER XIII

A SEPTEMBER SQUALL

It was a still, hazy September afternoon, so warm that the frost that had helped to open the chestnut burrs that very morning seemed to have been an hallucination. The lake was as calm as a millpond; but Lake Huron is notoriously treacherous.

Henry, the boatkeeper at Lakeview Hall, was not as weatherwise as he should have been. He had allowed a number of boats to be taken out that afternoon without warning the girls to beware of squalls.

Not that such warning would have been taken seriously by many of the girls, for a fairer day in the seeming had not appeared on the calendar. Nan and Bess decided to go out in one of the double canoes.

The chums from Tillbury did not own a boat. Several of the older girls did, and Bess had already written home for a motor boat.

"I'll tease dad for a motor boat first," she confided to Nan. "Of course he won't hear to *that.* So I'll try to get a sailboat—what do they call 'em? —a *cat,* with an auxiliary engine. And he won't listen to that, either."

"Why ask for something you know you can't have?" asked the wondering Nan.

"Goodness! don't you see?" exclaimed Bess, exasperated at such lack of understanding. "Why, if I ask for something big, dad will compromise in the end, and probably give me just what I originally expected to have. 'Aim high' is my motto. Oh, we'll get a nice canoe, at the least, or a cedar boat with a portable engine and propeller."

This way of getting what one wished rather shocked Nan, who always asked pointblank for what she wanted, but was usually wise enough not to think too much about what she knew she could not have.

"That's an awfully roundabout way of getting what you desire," she suggested to Bess.

"Oh! you don't know my father. Mother has to do the same. He has plenty of money, but sometimes he hates to give it up. I can tease almost anything out of him."

"Hush, Bess! Suppose anybody else should hear you?" Nan suggested.

"Well, it's true," said careless Bess. "There's that Linda Riggs going down with Gracie Mason to the dock. I bet Walter is coming in his *Bargain Rush* for Grace, and Linda will get invited. I'd just love to have a motor boat, Nan, just to get ahead of Linda. She can't have one, I heard Cora say, because her father is afraid of them."

"None of the girls own motor boats," Nan said, calmly. "The canoe is all right."

They were in the canoe and had put up the little leg-o'-mutton sail, before Walter Mason's *Bargain Rush* came out around Lighthouse Point, from the inlet, and chugged over to the school dock where Walter's sister was waiting.

"Walter is just devoted to Grace," Nan said. "I think he is a dreadfully nice boy."

"Better keep your opinion to yourself," laughed Bess. "Linda thinks she about owns him. You see, he's the only boy available about the school and Linda has always been used to having the best of everything."

"So have you," laughed Nan, roguishly.

"But not in boys!" cried Bess. "Billy is enough. If they are all like that brother of mine——"

"You know Walter isn't," said Nan.

"Goodness! No! Walter Mason is as meek as Moses! As meek as his own sister. And I think Gracie is the most milk-and-watery girl I ever saw."

"She's timid, I know," began Nan, but her chum interrupted quickly:

"Oh, yes! You'll find a good word to say for her, Nan. You always champion the cause of the weak and afflicted. Every sore-eyed kitten you saw on the street at Tillbury used to appeal to you."

"Oh, bosh!" exclaimed Nan. "You make me out a whole lot worse than I am."

The canoe suddenly dipped sideways and Bess squealed as a splash of water came inboard. "Sit down! you're rocking the boat!" she sang.

"That was a flaw of wind. Guess we'll have to watch out. Don't tie the sheet to that cleat, Bess."

"'Sheet'? Oh! you mean this rope. I never can remember nautical names. But I've got to hitch the thing, Nan. I want to wash my hands. And this water ought to be got out. There's a big sponge in the bow-locker. There! I got that right, didn't I? 'Bow locker.'"

Nan was steering with a paddle and could not give her full attention to the sail. The sea was choppy and it took some effort to keep the head of the canoe properly pointed.

Nan was bare-headed, but Bess wore a rubber bathing cap. Nan's braids snapped about her shoulders when the boisterous wind swooped down upon them. Farther out upon the lake white-caps appeared.

"I guess we'd better not go very far to-day," Nan said cautiously.

"There go Walter and those girls!" Bess cried. "Yes! Linda is aboard. What did I tell you?"

"Well, they can get back more quickly than *we* can," Nan said seriously.

"Oh, let's go a little farther. I like it when the canoe tumbles about," declared reckless Bess.

Nan knew that if the wind held at its present

point it would be more aid to them in running back than while they were on this present tack, so she did not insist upon turning about immediately. What she did not know was, that the recurrent flaws in the wind foretold a sudden change in its direction.

There were plenty of other pleasure boats about them at first; and as Bess pointed out, Walter Mason's *Bargain Rush* had passed the canoe, going out. What the two chums did not notice, however, was that these other boats, including the *Bargain Rush,* soon made for the shore.

The fishing boats from Freeling were driving in toward the inlet, too. Wise boatmen saw the promise of "dirty weather." Not so Nan and Bess. The tang of the spray on their lips, the wind blowing their braids and freshening the roses in their cheeks, the caress of it on their bare arms and necks, the excitement of sitting in the pitching canoe—all delighted and charmed the girls.

They were soon far from all other boats, the canoe was scuttling over the choppy waves like a quail running to cover, the bellying sail actually hiding from their eyes the threatening clouds that were piling up in the east and south.

Suddenly the wind died. Their sail hung flabbily from the pole. Nan began to look anxiously about.

"If we have to paddle clear back to the boathouse," she began, when Bess suddenly gasped:

"Oh, Nan! Look there!"

Nan gazed as her chum pointed "sou'east." A mass of slate-colored clouds seemed to reach from the apex of the heavenly arch to the lead-colored water. Along the lower edge of this curtain of cloud ran a white line, like the bared teeth of a wolf!

Nan was for the moment speechless. She had never seen such alarming clouds. She and Bess had yet to see a storm on the Great Lakes. Nothing like this approach of wind and rain had ever been imagined by the two girls.

Out of the clouds came a low moaning—the voice of the rising wind. Soon, too, the swish of falling rain, which was beating the surface of the water to foam as it advanced, was also audible.

"Oh! what shall we do?" moaned Bess.

Nan was aroused by this. She glanced wildly around. They were a long way off Lighthouse Point, at the entrance to Freeling Inlet, and the storm was coming in such a direction that they must be driven up the lake and away from the Hall boat-landing—if, indeed, the canoe were not immediately swamped.

"Let go the sheet, Bess! Let go the sheet!" was Nan's first cry.

"Goodness me! And the pillow cases, too, if you say so!" chattered Bess, clawing wildly at the rope in question.

But she had tied it in a hard knot to the cleat, and the more she tried to pull the knot loose, the tighter it became.

"Quick! quick!" Nan cried, trying to paddle the canoe around.

She understood nothing about heading into the wind's eye; Nan only realized that they would likely be overturned if the wind and sea struck the canoe broadside.

The storm which had, at first, approached so slowly, now came down upon the canoe at terrific speed. The wind shrieked, the spray flew before it in a cloud, and the curtain of rain surrounded and engulfed the two girls and their craft.

The sail was torn to shreds. Nan had managed to head the canoe about and they took in the waves over the stern. She was saturated to the very skin by the first bucket of water.

Bess, with a wild scream of fear, cast herself into Nan's arms.

"We'll be drowned! we'll be drowned!" was her cry.

Nan thought so, too, but she tried to remain calm.

The water fairly boiled about them. It jumped and pitched most awfully. The water that came inboard threatened to swamp the canoe.

Peril, Nan had faced before; but nothing like this. Each moment, as the canoe staggered on and the waves rose higher and the wind shrieked louder,

Nan believed that they were nearer and nearer to death.

She did not see how they could possibly escape destruction. The sea fairly yawned for them. The canoe sank lower and lower as the foam-streaked water slopped in over the gunnels. *They were going to be swamped!*

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE NICK OF TIME

Bess Harley clung to her chum in an agony of apprehension. Perhaps Nan would have utterly given way to terror, too, had she not felt herself obliged to bolster up poor Bess.

The wind shrieked so about the two girls, and the roar of the rain and sea so deafened them, that Nan could offer little verbal comfort. She could only hug Bess close to her and pat her shoulder caressingly.

Then suddenly Nan seized the bathing cap from her chum's head, and, pushing Bess aside, began to bail frantically with the rubber head covering. The rain and spray were rapidly sinking the canoe, and to free it of the accumulation of water was their only hope.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear, Nan!" groaned Bess, over and over.

Nan had no breath left for idle talk. She bailed out the water as fast as she could. The canoe was too water-logged already to be easily steered. The sea merely drove it on and on; providentially it did not broach to.

"Throw out the cushions!" Nan finally cried to her chum. "Throw them out, it will lighten the canoe a little."

"But—but we'll have to pay for them," objected Bess, for perhaps the first time in her life becoming cautious.

"Do as I say!" commanded Nan. "What are a few cushions if we can save our lives?"

"But we *can't!* We're sure to drown!" wailed Bess.

Nan was not at all sure that this was not true. She would not, however, own up that she thought so.

"You do as I say, Bess!" she ordered. "Throw out the cushions! Never mind if we drown the next minute!"

"You—you are awful!" sobbed Bess.

Nevertheless, she jerked the cushions out over the side. One after the other they floated away. Then Nan was suddenly stricken with fear. Maybe she had done the wrong thing. By the way the cushions floated they might be of cork and if worse came to worst, they might have been used as life-preservers.

But the canoe was lightened. Nan unhooked a chair-back amidships and threw it overboard. All the time she was bailing faithfully. After being thus lightened, the canoe began to rise upon the waves more buoyantly.

Perhaps, however, that was because the rain had passed over. The driving sleet-like fall of it had saturated the two girls in the canoe. They could be no wetter now—not if they were completely engulfed by the rising sea.

The violence of the wind had actually beaten the sea down; but behind the squall, as it swept on, the waves were rising tumultuously.

"This won't last long—it *can't* last long," Nan thought.

She raised her eyes to look about. The darkness of evening seemed already to hover upon the bosom of the lake. The boat-landing and boathouse were both out of sight. On the crag-like bluff the Hall was merely a misty outline, hanging like a cloud-castle in the air.

Bess was crying steadily. Nan thought of her mother and her father, so far away. If anything happened to her they would be a long time finding it out.

And there was Uncle Henry and Aunt Kate and the boys! They would feel very bad, Nan knew, if anything happened to her. So would Toby Vanderwiller and Mrs. Vanderwiller and Corson. And perhaps queer little Margaret Lewellen and her brother, Bob——

Was it the spray, or did tears fill Nan Sherwood's eyes so that she could see nothing moving on the face of the wild waters? Yet, of a sudden, there

came into hearing the sharp, staccato report of an engine exhaust.

"A motor boat!" Nan gasped, still bailing desperately.

The sputtering noise drew nearer.

"Oh, Bess!" Nan cried.

"Oh, Nan!" responded her chum.

"Do you hear it?"

"It's that boat," Bess said, sniffling. "If they only see us!"

"Can you see them?"

Nan could not stop bailing. Every now and then a wave would slop over the side and the canoe would settle deeper in the lake.

Bess climbed unsteadily to her knees. Hope revived in her breast. She wiped the spray out of her eyes with the back of her hand and stared all about. Yes! there was the darting motor boat.

"It's Walter!" she cried to her chum.

"Does he see us?"

"He's—he's going ri-i-ight past!" wailed Bess.

"Wave to him! Shout to him!" commanded Nan.

"A lot of good tha-a-at'll do!" pursued the unhappy Bess. "They're so-o fa-a-ar away."

Nan uttered a shriek just then that must have been heard a long way down wind. A big wave boarded them, filling the canoe almost full, and

throwing Bess on her face. Nan seized her chum and drew her up out of the water so that she might get her breath.

The canoe shook and staggered. It was going down! Another such shipment of water and the girls would be engulfed!

"Scream! Let's both scream together!" commanded Nan.

Her chum's cry was a very weak one indeed. But Nan's voice rang out vigorously across the waves.

"Help! We're sinking!"

Almost immediately an answering cry came down the wind:

"Hold o-on! We're coming!"

"I'd like to know what we're to hold onto," gasped Nan, kneeling waist-deep in the water.

She had to hold up Bess, who was almost ready to collapse. Left to herself, Nan's chum would have succumbed before the motor boat arrived. It was Walter's boat. To Nan's surprise, his sister and Linda Riggs were still with him.

"Stand by for the buoy!" called out Walter, and flung the inflated ring attached to a strong line.

It floated near the submerged canoe almost at once. Nan felt the canoe going down, and with her arm about Bess, she flung herself away from the sinking craft.

"Oh! oh!" gurgled Bess.

"Keep up!" cried Nan.

"Don't sink, girls!" shouted Walter Mason. "I'll get you!"

He, however, had his hands pretty full with the boat. It had lost headway and was inclined to swing broadside to the waves, which, every minute, were running higher.

Nan and Bess were both good swimmers; yet Bess was now all but helpless through fright. She would have sunk immediately had not Nan's arm been about her.

Nan struck out for the bobbing ring. A wave carried them toward the life-buoy and as they fell down the slant of that wave, they fairly plunged onto the big canvas-covered ring.

"I've got it!" yelled Nan, exultantly; and the next moment water filled her mouth and she swallowed so much that she felt almost waterlogged.

"Hang on!" shouted Walter, encouragingly.

He started the screw again. Grace, who was thoroughly frightened, made out, however, to hold the wheel steady. Walter ran to the stern and drew in the life-buoy, towing the imperiled girls round to leeward of the plunging motor boat.

The rescue was barely in the nick of time. They lifted Bess Harley over the low rail of the *Bargain Rush,* almost senseless. Nan managed to climb in unaided. They were not much wetter than those already aboard the motor boat.

Linda was very ill, and hung over the rail forward. Grace was crying, amidships, and trying to steer the boat while Walter tinkered with the engine. Bess and Nan lay in the cockpit, recovering from their fight with the sea.

It was a very miserable party, indeed.

CHAPTER XV

THE BOATHOUSE GHOST

BETWEEN her throes of sea-sickness, Linda began to be heard.

"I'll never forgive you, never, Walter Mason! Nor you, either, Grace! You brought me out here to drown me! I'll tell my father!"

This had probably been going on for some time before Nan and her chum were assisted aboard the *Bargain Rush.* Walter seemed to be pretty well disgusted with the railroad magnate's daughter.

"Don't tell your father till you get ashore, Linda," he advised.

"You're just as horrid as you can be!" gasped Linda.

"Don't mind him, Linda," begged peace-loving Grace. "And, really, it isn't his fault."

"You're just as bad as he is, every whit!" snapped the unpleasant girl. "You both were determined to come out here when I wanted to go ashore."

"Why!" gasped Grace, showing some pluck for once, "you wouldn't have had Walter leave Nan and Bess to drown, would you?"

"And now we're *all* going to be drowned!" was Linda's response, but hastily leaning over the rail again, her voice was stifled.

"If—if I ever get to shore alive," she finally wailed, "I'll never even go in wading again."

Had the situation really not seemed so tragic, Nan would have laughed. Bess had joined Linda at the rail, being just as sick as the other. Grace looked green about the lips, herself; but she was plucky. Nan felt no qualms.

"Let me take the wheel, Walter," she said to Grace's brother. "I know how to steer."

"Good for you, Miss Sherwood!" cried the boy. "And you're not afraid, either?"

"No—not *much,*" answered Nan, stoutly.

"The boat's as safe as a house. The squall's gone over now. We'll soon get to land. Let her off another point now."

Nan obeyed. The propeller began kicking in regular time. They were able to head around toward the shore. Walter soon took the wheel again and guided the *Bargain Rush* more directly toward the anchorage before the Hall. They were all of three miles from the boathouse.

"We'll make it all right now, Miss Sherwood," said Walter, cheerfully.

"It was awfully good of you to come out for us," Nan said.

"Goodness! we couldn't do less, could we?"

"I guess Linda wouldn't have come if she had had her way."

"Well! Grace isn't that kind," said the brother, loyally. "Of course, we would have done everything in our power to save you girls."

"And we will never forget it!" Nan cried warmly. "We would have drowned."

"Never mind," said Walter, in embarrassment. "It's all right now."

"I—I guess the other girls don't think so," said Nan, suddenly observing her chum and the other two. All three were violently sick. "It is awfully rough."

"We're catching these waves sideways," Walter said. "Wait till we get in the lea of Lighthouse Point. It won't be so bad then."

This was a true prophecy, and the *Bargain Rush* was soon sailing on even keel. Linda, as well as the other girls, recovered in a measure from the feeling of nausea that had gripped them. As soon as the vulgar girl regained her voice she began to scold again.

"We'd never been in all this trouble if you'd listened to me, Walter Mason! This is awful!"

"Oh, it's better now, Linda," said Walter, cheerfully. "We'll soon be at the Hall dock."

"And that's where you should have landed Grace and me just as soon as the storm came up," grumbled Linda.

"But we saw the canoe in trouble——"

"I didn't see it!" snapped the girl, crossly.

"But I did," Walter said warmly. "It would have been a wicked and inhuman thing to have turned away. We had to save Miss Sherwood and Miss Harley."

"And risk *my* life doing it!" cried Linda. "I shall tell my father."

"If you tell your father everything you promise to," said Walter, with some spirit, "he must be an awfully busy man just attending to your complaints."

"Oh, my!" gasped Bess, with wan delight. Meek Walter Mason was beginning to show boldness in dealing with the purse-proud girl.

"You're a nasty thing!" snapped Linda to Walter. "And I don't like you."

"I'll get over that," muttered the boy to himself.

"And your sister is just as bad!" scolded Linda, giving way to her dreadful temper as Nan and Bess had seen her do on the train. "I'll show you both that you can't treat me in any such way. I've always stood up for your dunce of a sister. That's what she is, a dunce!"

"If you were a boy, I'd thrash you for saying that!" declared Walter, quietly, though in a white heat of passion himself.

"Oh! oh!" shrieked Linda. "So you threaten to strike me, do you? If I tell my father *that*——"

"Oh, tell him!" exclaimed Walter, in exasperation.

"Of all the mean girls!" murmured Bess, with her arm about Grace, who was crying softly and begging her brother to desist.

"Oh! I can see what's caused all this," went on Linda, in her high-pitched voice. "Grace was mighty glad to have me and my friends even look at her before Nan Sherwood and Bess Harley came to the Hall. I wish her all the benefit she may derive from associating with *them*. I know one is a thief and the other is no better."

Bess turned upon the enraged girl with an angry retort. But Nan stopped her.

"Don't reply, Bess," said Nan, in a low voice. "Brawling never proves anything, or settles any argument. But if she keeps on saying in public that I am a thief I shall go to Dr. Prescott about it."

"You wouldn't be a tell-tale?" gasped Bess, horrified.

"In this case I will," Nan said firmly. "And she shall apologize in public."

Linda, by this time, had, in a measure, quieted down. She was sobbing angrily and did not hear what Nan said. The other young people left her strictly alone until the *Bargain Rush* reached the dock.

Oddly enough not even the boatkeeper. Henry,

had discovered the absence of the canoe in which Nan and Bess had sailed away from the landing two hours and more before. The other boats had come in, in a hurry, when the squall arose, and it was now so late that all the girls had gone up the bluff. The supper gong would sound soon.

Henry had gone to his supper, intending to return later to put all the boats under cover and lock up the house. The girls said Henry was afraid of the boathouse ghost himself, and would never go into the building after dusk without a lantern.

Linda stepped ashore and marched away with her head in the air. Grace had permission to go home with her brother to supper. Mr. Mason, who was an influential lawyer, owned a country home up the lake shore, beyond Professor Krenner's queer little cabin, and the brother and sister proposed going to their home in the *Bargain Rush.* Grace would return to the Hall later, by automobile.

Nan and Bess were grateful to Walter and Grace.

"We cannot tell you how we feel, *inside,* Walter," Nan said softly. "Nothing we can ever do for you will repay you——"

"Oh, don't!" begged the boy.

"You've got to hear your praises sung!" cried Bess, laughing and sobbing at once. "I shall write home to my folks about it. And we shall tell all the girls."

"I wish you wouldn't!" gasped the embarrassed youth.

"And your sister will never miss Linda Riggs' friendship," said Nan, stoutly. "We'll see that Linda does not bother her, either."

"Oh! you're so brave, Nan," murmured the timid Grace.

"It doesn't take much courage to face a girl like Linda," Nan retorted. "I've seen already that she has very few real friends in the school, and those she has to pay high to keep. I would rather have her for an enemy than a friend."

Nan and Bess kissed Grace and shook hands with her brother. The chums were both as wet as they could be, and the evening air felt chill.

"We'd better get our sweaters," Nan said.

"Oh! they're in the dressing room of the boat-house," objected Bess.

"Yes, I know it," her chum said, starting off.

"But, Nan!"

"Well?"

"Sup—suppose we *see* something?" gasped Bess.

"Why, we want to see something," said Nan, puzzled. "We want to see our sweaters. And we want to feel them, too."

"But I don't mean that," insisted Bess.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what they say," objected Bess Harley. "It's haunted!"

"I declare! you don't believe that foolishness, do you, Bess Harley?" cried Nan.

"I don't know whether I believe it or not," confessed her chum. "But I don't want to see any ghost."

"I don't believe you ever will, honey," Nan said, more seriously.

"You can laugh——"

"I'm not laughing. But we can't stand here and take cold. We want those sweaters."

"I'd rather not go," Bess whispered, hanging back.

"Then *I'll* go."

"But I don't want you to leave me alone," objected Bess.

"You're the greatest girl I ever saw!" sputtered Nan.

"I know I'm a coward," said her friend, shakingly. "I'd have given up all hope and been drowned, out there on the lake, if it hadn't been for you, dear Nan."

"Nonsense! Come on! Let's get the sweaters. It's almost supper time and Mrs. Cupp will give us fits."

"She won't, for I shall tell her just how brave you were, and how Walter saved us both."

"Ha!" cried Nan. "After being through what we have this afternoon, Bess, I shouldn't think you'd be afraid of the dark."

"It *is* dark," murmured Bess, as they approached the boathouse.

"Bah!" repeated Nan, gently scornful.

"Maybe you won't 'bah' so much before we get out," whispered Bess, as they entered the open door and approached the girls' dressing room and lockers.

They had to cross the big room where the boats were hauled up the sloping plank floor from the cove. It was dark and mysterious.

Suddenly Bess clutched her chum by the arm. "Oh-o-o!" she moaned faintly.

Her shaking hand indicated the direction of a window across the room. It was lighter outside the boathouse than it was within. Against the gray background of the window-pane moved a figure! A black figure! A human figure!

The two girls halted and clung together. Even Nan's heart beat faster.

The figure moved slowly across the window opening. It made no sound. It disappeared for a moment and then reappeared before a second window. It was all in black and not very tall. It was soon gone entirely.

The girls heard no door open and close. It was just as though the black figure had evaporated—melted into the air!

"The ghost! What did I tell you, Nan Sherwood?" moaned Bess.

CHAPTER XVI

RELATING IT ALL

"I WON'T believe it!" declared Nan Sherwood.

"You saw it with your own eyes!"

"I don't believe my own eyes, then!" was Nan's energetic rejoinder.

"Well, I know I saw it!"

"That doesn't convince me in the least, Bess Harley."

"Well! you are the most obstinate girl!"

"I won't own up to such foolishness!" cried Nan, hotly. "A ghost *just doesn't exist!*"

They were back in their own room at Lakeview Hall. Bess could not have told for the life of her how they had obtained their sweaters out of the locker, put them on, and escaped from the boat-house. But she knew that somehow Nan had kept her from running away in a panic.

"Why, Nan, we *saw* it!" Bess reiterated.

"Saw what?"

"The ghost."

"We saw nothing of the kind. We saw something."

"Well!"

"But a ghost is nothing. We could not see a spirit. That was something palpable we saw. It crossed in front of two windows and we could not see through it. It had a solid body."

"We—ell," Bess returned. "There may be solid ghosts."

"Doesn't stand to reason. There's supper!"

"I—I don't want supper much," said Bess, shivering.

"We'll go down and ask Susan for hot tea. That's what we need," said practical Nan. "And let's keep still about this."

"About Walter and all?"

"Oh, no! I mean about what we saw at the boathouse."

"Then you do admit we saw something?" cried Bess.

"That's just it," said Nan drily. "We did see something. Therefore it was not a ghost."

Her insistence on this point vexed Bess not a little. She felt that they had seen a strange thing, and she wanted to tell the other girls about it. But what would be the use of doing that if her chum pooh-poohed the idea of a ghost and merely went to Henry, as she threatened to, and told him that some tramp, or other prowler, was hanging about the boathouse?

"For," said Nan, "the girls keep bathing suits and sweaters and all sorts of things down there

and that fellow, whoever he is, may be light-fingered."

"Dear me!" grumbled Bess, "you never are romantic."

"Humph! what's romantic about a disembodied spirit? Smells of the tomb!" declared Nan.

There was one thing, however, that had to be told. The canoe was lost and Mrs. Cupp must be informed at once. So after supper the two chums sought that stern lady's room, which was right at the top of the basement stairs.

As Nan and Bess approached this "ogress' castle," as the girls called Mrs. Cupp's room, a tall, thin lady was going in ahead of them. She had on her coat and hat and was evidently a visitor from outside.

"Dear me! who's that?" whispered Nan, to her chum.

"Oh! I know," Bess replied eagerly. "One of the girls pointed her out to me on the street and I never *could* forget that funny, old-fashioned hat."

"Well!" exclaimed Nan, hanging back, "who is she?"

"Mrs. Cupp's sister. She lives alone in the village. She's a milliner. That's why she wears such an awful hat, I suppose," giggled Bess. "By the same token shoemakers' wives go almost barefoot."

"Hush!" breathed Nan.

The visitor's high-pitched, querulous voice

reached their ears plainly, for she had not taken pains to close the door.

"Well, now, Ida, what did I tell you?" she began. "He's back again."

"Goodness! how you startled me, Sadie Vane," was Mrs. Cupp's response. She had evidently been sitting at her desk with her back to the door.

"You'll be more startled, Ida Cupp, when you hear what I have to tell you," Miss Vane went on to say hurriedly.

"Well! do shut the door. You needn't tell it to the whole school, Sadie," said the matron, sharply.

The door banged.

"This is no time for us to interview Mrs. Cupp," said Nan, sensibly, and she and her chum withdrew.

Linda Riggs had confided a garbled account of the boating accident to her particular chum and roommate, Cora Courtney. Of course, Cora eagerly spread the tidings. There was a group of excited girls in the main study when Nan and Bess came through the front hall, ready to pounce on them.

"Hey, sawneys!" ordered Mabel Schiff, a big girl who would graduate from the Hall at the end of the school year. "Come in here and give an account of yourselves."

"Let's not, Nan," whispered Bess, hanging back.

"Come on!" commanded the big girl.

"Why not?" Nan asked her chum. "They've all got to know about it."

"She's a friend of Linda's," Bess again whispered.

"Then we'll find out what Linda has told," Nan said, and boldly entered the room.

"Hullo!" said the big girl. "You don't look much like a couple of drowned rats. They tell me you've been overboard."

"We got wet," admitted Nan, quietly.

"Got wet! Why, you lost your canoe, and were almost drowned, and if it hadn't been for Linda Riggs, you wouldn't have been saved!"

"In spite of her we were saved, is nearer the truth," Nan declared, but without showing any of the warmth that Bess was beginning to display.

"How ridiculous! She saw you and made that Mason boy sail over to you and pick you up, didn't she?"

"No, she didn't!" snapped Bess, quite losing her temper now.

"Oh, of course you kids would say that," scoffed the big girl. "You don't like Linda. But poor Linda was so sick she couldn't come down to supper."

"She was sicker out in that boat," Bess said, with a laugh. "You should have seen her."

"And you can laugh?" groaned Miss Schiff.

"It was no laughing matter for a while," Nan put in, good-naturedly. "We really were in great trouble. Our canoe was lost——"

"You'll have to pay for that, children," Mabel Schiff cried.

"We know all that!" Bess returned smartly. "And our folks are quite as well able to pay for the old thing as Linda's father."

"Oh, hush, Bess!" begged Nan, *sotto voce*. This sort of talk did sound so common!

"I don't care! I'm sick of hearing about Linda's riches," Bess rejoined.

"I suppose you girls think you saved yourselves?" the big girl went on.

"No; we did not," Nan said, with seriousness. "Walter Mason saved us. We would have drowned had it not been for Walter."

"Oh! of course it was his boat——"

"It was Walter himself who did it all," Nan went on, enthusiastically. "He is as brave as he can be." She then related the whole incident, just as it had taken place. The girls listened attentively at last, for the story of the squall and the boating accident that followed it, with the details of the rescue, lost nothing in Nan's telling.

"Great! great!" shouted Laura Polk, when Nan finished. "You ought to be class historian, Nancy Sherwood."

"But how about Linda?" suggested another girl, slily. "She is some historian, too, isn't she?"

Now, Nan had said nothing in her veracious tale about the purse-proud girl; but Mabel Schiff said:

"I don't believe all that. I guess Linda was there as much as these freshies——"

"Yes, she was!" exclaimed Bess, excitedly. "And all she did was to be ill, over the rail of the boat, and scold Walter for making any effort to save us. That's the sort of a girl Linda is."

"That sounds a good deal like her," announced the red-haired girl, bluntly. "Linda Riggs can't pull the wool over our eyes—much! We've all seen enough of her to know pretty much what she would do at such a time."

"You're all jealous of her," sniffed Mabel.

"Sure!" laughed Laura. "We're jealous of her kind disposition, her honey-dripping tongue, and her delightfully social ways."

"And her money!" flashed Mabel.

"I think," said May Winslow, a peace-loving and, withal, ladylike girl—"I think we have discussed an absent fellow-pupil quite enough. Let us say nothing about Linda that we would not say to her."

"Oh, goodness!" cried the impulsive Bess. "I'd say just what I think of her, to her face."

"That would not make it the less ill-natured," said May, quietly.

CHAPTER XVII

A LARK IN PROSPECT

Dr. Beulah Prescott herself heard of the chums' adventure and called Nan and Bess into her office before bedtime.

"What is all this I hear about your trying to cross Lake Huron in an open boat?" asked the principal, lightly.

But she looked grave enough before Nan had finished her true and particular narrative of the incident. Dr. Prescott did not scold the chums, as Mrs. Cupp certainly would have done. But she went much more thoroughly into the affair than the matron could, or would.

She sent for Henry, the boatkeeper, and that rather careless individual learned that he was expected to have a closer oversight over the use of the boats by the girls at all times; and especially was he to watch the weather signals which were flown from the pole at the life-saving station on Lighthouse Point.

Nan said nothing to the principal of the school about the person she and Bess had seen prowling about the boathouse. She thought that for once probably Henry had enough trouble!

When Grace Mason got back to the Hall at nine o'clock, she was also called in to see "Dr. Beulah," as most of the girls affectionately called the preceptress. But Linda was not called upon to give her version of the adventure at all.

Later the preceptress wrote a very nice letter to Walter Mason's father, commending his son for the bravery and good sense he had shown in saving the girl canoeists. Nan, and Bess, and even Grace, were made a good deal of by the other girls because of the adventure. And every time Walter Mason came to see his sister, Grace asked permission for Nan and Bess to meet him, too. In this way the chums from Tillbury got many an automobile ride and boat ride that they would not otherwise have enjoyed.

Because of this new association of Nan and Bess with Grace and her brother, Linda Riggs' tongue dripped venom, not honey. The rich girl had gathered around her a coterie of girls like Cora Courtney and Mabel Schiff, and they echoed Linda's ill-natured remarks and ridiculous stories. The great number of the older girls at Lakeview Hall, as Nan had very sensibly said, paid no attention whatsoever to the ill-natured talk of Linda Riggs' clique. As for those girls smaller and younger than Nan and Bess (and there were many of them) they were little interested in the controversy.

Of course, right at the beginning of her school

life at Lakeview Hall, Nan Sherwood had made friends with the little girls. They all soon learned that Nan was sympathetic, could enter into their play with perfect equality, was glad to help them in their lessons, and altogether filled the part of "Big Sister" to perfection.

Bess did not care so much for children. Perhaps it was because she had some bothersome small brothers and sisters at home. Nan, who was an only child, had always longed for a brother or sister. Although she could not remember him, the tiny brother who had lived a short few weeks at the "little dwelling in amity," and then had gone away forever, was much in Nan Sherwood's thoughts.

"It gets me," Bess sputtered once to her chum, "how you can actually play dolls with those primary kids—a big girl like you."

"I like dolls," said Nan, placidly.

"Huh! I believe you do," cried Bess. "I wonder you don't litter up our room with 'em—and doll clothes and baby carriages and cradles," and Bess laughed gaily, with no idea of how close she had come to touching upon Nan's secret.

Dr. Prescott did not make the chums pay for the lost canoe, so Nan, relieved of the necessity for doing so, decided not to tell her father and mother about the canoe accident, as she knew they would

worry needlessly. Nor did careless Bess tell her parents. Bess had a strong personal reason for keeping the adventure a secret. She did not want to put any obstacle in the way of the purchase of the boat she was teasing for.

Nan was writing long and enthusiastic letters to Scotland. In return she received from both "Momsey" and "Papa Sherwood" most encouraging reports of the progress of the court proceedings over Mr. Hughie Blake's will, under the terms of which Mrs. Sherwood was to receive considerable wealth. It seemed that the controversy was practically finished, and Nan's parents would soon be coming home. In one of these letters, received early in the school year, Nan found a five pound note "to do just what she pleased with."

"Oh! what'll you do with so much money?" gasped Bess. "And all in a bunch. Twenty-five dollars! Why, Nan, your father must be richer than mine!"

"They know I haven't had much heretofore to spend extravagantly," responded Nan, her eyes twinkling, "while you have been extravagant all your life."

"Well! My father never gives me such a sum all at once for spending money. But you're so cautious, Nan. Ugh! 'sensible!' I hate that word!"

"So do I dislike it," said Nan, briskly. "I don't

think I am any more sensible than other girls—unless I'm more so than you, Bess," and she laughed at her chum.

"Well! what will you do with your money?" asked Bess. "That will tell the story."

"I—don't know."

"Have a regular big junket."

"What? Treat the whole school to ice-cream?" laughed Nan.

"Ho! ice-cream melts too fast. It's all over too soon," returned Bess, with a frown.

"Buy lollypops, then—or jaw-breakers? They last longer."

"Say! this is no time to joke. It's serious," declared Bess, putting her mind to the matter of the disbursement of her chum's windfall.

"All right," agreed Nan. "The Committee on Entertainment will now go into executive session. What's your idea, Elizabeth, about buying every one of the two hundred girls at Lakeview Hall a twelve-and-a-half cent rubber doll?"

"Doll? Pah! your mind runs on dolls, Nan Sherwood. You are certainly getting into your second childhood," said Bess, with disgust.

"Perhaps," admitted Nan.

"Do let's be serious," Bess begged again. "What is the most popular thing among the girls?"

"Those new side-combs!" exclaimed Nan.

"Yes—and I'm going to have a pair just as soon as mother sends me my next spending money."

"I'll buy you a pair," said generous Nan, quickly.

"No, you won't, silly! I'll not let you fritter away any of that perfectly splendid five pound note in foolishness."

"Oh!" responded Nan, drily, much amused to hear Bess Harley so very practical.

The practicality of the discussion might be doubted by anybody save boarding-school girls. Bess quickly proved to her own satisfaction, if not entirely to Nan's, that the small, "after-hours supper" was the most popular form of entertainment then in vogue at Lakeview Hall.

"You know, Cora Courtney and that crowd are always talking about a strawberry festival that she and Linda Riggs engineered last June. And now they are planning to have another big spread soon in some room on their corridor."

"Well," observed Nan, "we won't be invited to it."

"No. And they won't be invited to ours," cried Bess, promptly.

"If we have a spread," agreed Nan.

"It's just the thing," Bess pursued, very enthusiastic. "Eating promotes fellowship——"

"And indigestion," laughed Nan. "Especially such a combination as Laura had in her room the

other night—sour pickles, ice-cream cones, and salted peanuts."

"Whew! that was fierce!" acknowledged Bess. "I didn't eat much; but I felt squirmy, just the same, after it. But if we give the girls the big eats, let's have something nice, but digestible."

"Let's!" agreed Nan. "Of course, it's against the rules——"

"Oh, dear, now! don't begin that," begged Bess.

"We—ell——"

"They all do it. If Dr. Beulah wasn't so awfully strict about our having what she calls a 'plain, wholesome supper,' and refusing to let us add sweets, and the like, to the supper bill-of-fare, I'm sure the girls wouldn't be dying for these spreads."

"If the girls had what they wanted at supper, Dr. Prescott would have to charge about twice what she does now for tuition and board at Lakeview Hall.

"Never mind that," said Bess, briskly. "The question is: Shall we have the spread?"

"If you like," agreed Nan.

So it was decided. With twenty-five dollars they could have a bountiful feast.

"A dollar a plate will give us a delightful supper, with salad, and ices, and all," said Bess, who knew more about such things than Nan, for her mother entertained a great deal in Tillbury.

"But how'll we ever get such things up to our room?" gasped Nan.

That puzzled Bess.

"And twenty-five girls would just about swamp us," Nan added.

"Oh, dear!"

"Hire a hall?" suggested Nan, roguishly.

"Now, don't, Nan Sherwood! You're dreadful!" cried Bess, almost in tears as she saw her castle in the air dissolving.

"Wait!" commanded Nan, good-naturedly patting her chum on the shoulder. "All is not yet lost! Up and at 'em, guards! Never say die!"

"I'd just set my heart on the biggest kind of a spread," mourned Bess. "I wanted anything Cora, and Linda, and Mabel, and that set did, to look like a punctured jitney."

"Oh, Bess! what language!"

"We—ell."

"Now let me think," said Nan, seriously.

"Think what?"

"Thoughts, of course, goosey!" laughed Nan. "Wait! First we must plan to have the spread in a sufficiently roomy place."

"But it's got to be in the Hall," cried Bess.

"Or near it," suggested Nan.

"What do you mean?"

"Listen!" commanded Nan, dramatically. "I have thought of just the place. We can get the

goodies brought around from the caterer in Freeling, in a boat, and nobody'll be the wiser."

"But where—what?" demanded Bess.

So Nan told her.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE FATEFUL EVENING DRAWS NEAR

Bess Harley had said the discussion of how to spend the five pound note was a serious matter; and when the conference was concluded and the two chums separated to attend different classes, Bess' countenance certainly looked very grave.

Nan was secretly amused at the way in which her friend had taken the suggestion as to the place at which the proposed feast should be held. The thought had come to Nan in a flash; but to carry the scheme through was to test the courage of some of her school friends.

Bess was too proud, after all, to refuse to meet the terms on which her chum agreed to give the banquet; but it was plain she thought the suggestion a risky one. So she carried a rather glum face to Mademoiselle's music class, while Nan sought Professor Krenner for—yes!—a lesson in architectural drawing.

Actually, Nan had taken up this elective study. She had demurely marked a cross against that study at first, in a spirit of mischief. She liked queer old Professor Krenner from the start; and she had

threatened on the train coming up from Chicago, to become his pupil in the art which he admitted was his hobby. The professor was surprised nevertheless when Dr. Prescott passed Nan's name over to him without comment.

But once caught in the mesh of his own net, Professor Krenner was game. He put Nan down before him in the classroom, where the boards were for the most part covered with mathematical problems, and began to talk seriously, but in a popular strain, of form, color, and periods of architecture.

He was interested himself and he interested Nan. She took fire from his enthusiasm. He went to the board and illustrated his meaning with bold, rapid strokes of the chalk. He even erased problems and examples, in his eagerness to explain to an intelligent, youthful mind, ideas that he had long since evolved but had not put into words before.

"Hoity-toity!" he cried at last, in his odd, querulous way. "I've rubbed out half my work for tomorrow. Nancy Sherwood, you've bewitched me. You've set me talking on a theme I don't often touch. Now, are you satisfied?"

"I'm beginning to be just awfully interested," Nan declared, rising with a sigh. "Is the lesson over?"

"Ah! 'tis over," he growled, looking ruefully at his free-hand elevation of the Colosseum at Rome.

"And when do I come again?" asked Nan.

"Eh? And do you wish to continue this course?"

"I truly believe I'd like to see if I have a talent for architecture. I'm awfully interested. It's lots more entertaining than drawing butterflies and flowers. Can't a woman be an architect?"

"Hoity-toity! what's this?" asked the professor, and sat down again to stare at her.

"I really do like it, Professor," repeated Nan.

And from that time there dated a friendship between, and companionship of, Nan Sherwood and Professor Krenner that really made a great difference in both their lives.

Just now both chums from Tillbury were immensely interested in the secret banquet to which twenty-five of their closest friends were to be invited. Nor was it a small task to select those two score and five out of a possible hundred—for, of course, the "primes," or lower-grade girls, were not considered at all.

And then, there was the possibility of some of the invited guests being unwilling to attend. They had to face that from the start.

"You know very well," said Bess, when she had digested Nan's idea for a day or two, and grown more accustomed to it—"You know very well that wild horses wouldn't drag May Winslow to the feast."

"Why not?"

"You know how she feels about that place."

"And she's one of the very girls I want there," cried Nan. "We want to kill superstition and have a grand feast at one fell swoop. It's all nonsense! Some of the little girls have got hold of the foolish stories that have been told and they are almost afraid to go to bed at night in their big dormitories with all the other girls about them. It's ridiculous!"

"Oh, dear me, Nan!" groaned her chum. "You're too, too bold!"

"It doesn't take much boldness to disbelieve such old-wives' fables."

"And your own eyesight, too?" suggested Bess, slily.

"I'll never admit I have seen anything either spiritual or spirituous," laughed Nan.

"But they say there are underground passages from the unfinished part of the Hall, down there."

"What were they for?"

"Maybe smugglers," replied Bess, big-eyed at her own thought.

"Well! I never!"

"Lots of smuggling about Freeling years ago. Henry says so," declared Bess, stoutly.

"Goodness! what have you been reading?" demanded Nan. "Dime novels, I do believe, Bess Harley!"

"Just wait!" said her chum, prophetically. "I'm afraid we'll get into trouble over this after all."

And she was quite right; but it was not at all the sort of trouble Bess expected.

The chums obtained permission to go down town shopping and they made arrangements with the caterer for the supper to be ready on a certain evening—salads, sandwiches, and cake in hampers cream packed in ice; coffee and chocolate ready to warm on a stove which Nan knew would be in readiness; and plates, cups and saucers, knives and forks, and all other needfuls packed in proper containers, to be transported by water.

Nan had already bribed Henry; for the place where she was determined to have the banquet was in an unused part of the big boathouse, a sort of kitchen and dining room where there was a stove. Picnics had been held there before; but never at night. Many of the girls had declared they would not go there after dark because of the ghost. But Nan was determined to prick the bubble of that superstition. Where one girl would not go for fear of the supernatural, twenty-five would be afraid not to go because of the ridicule that would fall upon them.

Grace Mason and her roommate, the flaxen-haired Lillie Nevin, were among those who Bess had prophesied would not dare attend the banquet at the haunted boathouse. But Nan pleaded with them. She had to get Grace interested, for Nan desired to make use of Walter and his *Bargain*

Rush. The caterer could not deliver the supper after dark at the Lakeview Hall boat landing; but Walter could, and gladly agreed to do so. It was his enthusiasm over the proposed party that encouraged Grace—and through her, Lillie—to promise to attend.

Nan went to May Winslow in a personal way, too. She showed May, who was one of the larger girls, that her example would go far to kill the foolish belief rife among the girls that the boathouse was haunted.

Nan and Bess had never told any of their mates about their own strange experience in the boathouse. Nothing new had developed regarding the haunt. The "black ghost—all black" had not been reported seen since the previous spring. So the general excitement rife in the school at that time had subsided.

Gradually Nan and Bess spoke to, and obtained the promise of attendance of twenty-five girls. Each was bound to secrecy; but a secret among twenty-five girls has about as much chance as a kitten in a kennel of fox terriers.

It was whispered from one to the other that Nan Sherwood had twenty-five dollars—some said fifty—to spend on a single "spread." The girls were eager to be invited; all were curious; and the Linda Riggs clique was clamorously jealous.

CHAPTER XIX

SOME FUN—AND SOMETHING ELSE

Did they never study or work? Was it all fun and adventure at Lakeview Hall? No, no, indeed! There was plenty of work, and Nan Sherwood, with Bess Harley and her other friends, said they were "actually worked to death" by some of the teachers. For the very reason that they did do so much, their minds in hours of relaxation turned to such frolics as this one planned at the haunted boathouse.

Mademoiselle Loro was a little, dried, winter-leaf Frenchwoman, as quick and active as a cat and with beadlike black eyes, more like a bird's than those of a human being.

Mademoiselle Loro fairly slaved to make stubborn and careless girls attain a Parisian accent.

"And about all we get from the poor old dear," Laura said, "is a Paris-Kentucky accent and an ability to shrug our shoulders. Goodness! she's got me doing that, too."

As for the German teacher, Frau Deuseldorf, she was of a different type entirely. A tall, formidable looking woman was Frau Deuseldorf, with a mag-

nificent air, no waistline, and a wart on her nose. Nan, whenever she stood before the good lady, never *could* see anything of the teacher's face save that unfortunate blemish.

Perhaps the teacher whom the girls as a whole disliked the most was Professor Krenner. He was a martinet in mathematics; whereas Nan found him a most lovable and delightful instructor in architectural drawing. It finally became a regular practice for the architectural drawing class to attend the professor's lecture at his own cabin, one afternoon a week. And these afternoons were most delightfully spent.

Nan did not go alone. She had interested in the study another girl, and oddly enough that was "Procrastination Boggs." Amelia Boggs, from Wauhegan, was certainly peculiar; but Nan had learned to like her very quickly.

Amelia told Nan all about the clocks and watches. Her father owned a store in Wauhegan, which had been let to a jeweler and clock-dealer. Mr. Boggs could not collect his rent, and Amelia undertook to do so. The clock-dealer had no money, but he offered to pay his rent out of his stock-in-trade.

"I took him up on that, for Pop was too easy," explained Amelia, "and I went through his shop, looked at the price-tags, and picked out enough clocks and watches to fill a wheelbarrow. My brother Johnny wheeled 'em home. We sold some,

and I expected to sell some of these I brought with me. But the girls think it's such a joke I'll never be able to get rid of 'em. Never mind. It only makes 'em laugh, so where's the harm?"

That they laughed at her and her peculiarities, did not bother Amelia. With Nan and her friends, the girl from Wauhegan was happy; and if she did not get along very fast in some of her studies, it was not so serious a matter. Amelia was delighted to get down into the kitchen (she had bribed the cook with a clock) and there she concocted little dishes, some of which found their way to Dr. Prescott's table.

"Mercy on us!" said the preceptress, laughing. "Amelia will have me start a course in domestic science; and that is not what their parents have sent these girls to my school for."

However, once enlisted in the cause of Nan's banquet in the haunted boathouse, Amelia Boggs became very helpful. It was she who borrowed tablecloths and napkins from the cook for use at the feast. Henry kept the door of the unused part of the boathouse locked, only to be opened when Nan and Bess and Amelia went there to make final preparations for the banquet on the afternoon of the day selected.

They laid the cloths, trimmed and filled the hanging lamp, and laid the fire ready to light. Then the key of the door was entrusted to Walter Mason

and he ran around into Freeling port in his motor boat just before supper.

Nan thought Linda Riggs and Cora Courtney had been lingering about the boathouse, listening and peeping; but she did not suspect these girls, disagreeable and objectionable as they were, would be mean enough to tell any teacher about the proposed banquet.

"I suppose they are only wondering if we are to have a finer spread than they will have at their banquet," Nan said to Bess.

"I just hate their snooping around so," grumbled Bess.

Soon after supper Walter telephoned to his sister from their own house that all was well. He had delivered the goods at the boathouse and, with the help of the Masons' gardener, had carried everything into the unused part of the building, as agreed. The key had been left in a secret corner known only to himself and Nan, and—he wished the girls good luck!

Nan and her friends were all excitement that evening. Not much preparation was made for the following day's tasks. Had Mrs. Cupp not been very busy about her own affairs, she would surely have noticed that some of her charges were in a great flutter.

Miss Sadie Vane, Mrs. Cupp's sister, had come to see her on this evening, and in great excitement

again. As soon as the matron was relieved of her supper duties she put on her wraps and left for the village with Miss Vane.

This relieved the minds of Nan and Bess not a little. They ran down to the boathouse and found the key. But Bess utterly refused to go in without a light, and without the other girls for company.

"Oh, all right," said Nan. "I guess everything is safe. And all of the girls are so afraid of the place after dark that if they could get in they would not dare."

The evening dragged by. Curfew rang and still Mrs. Cupp did not return. Heavy-footed Susan went up through the corridors and looked to the lowering of the lights. Then she returned and the older girls were left to themselves—supposedly for the night.

"When the cat's away the mice can play." It was then figures stole out of certain rooms, and along the corridors, and down the stairs. A rear door had been unchained. One by one the softly flitting figures gathered in the back garden.

There was a wan moon to give them light enough to find the way to the foot of the bluff. But it was a ghostly moon, too, and aided objects along the way in casting wierd shadows. May Winslow clung close to Nan and Bess. Grace and Lillie made up the rest of the trembling group who looked to Nan for comfort and support. Laura Polk and "Pro-

crastination Boggs" brought up a more or less courageous rear. In between were girls in all stages of excitement, from a state of hysterical fear to equally hysterical laughter.

They came finally to the foot of the long flight of steps and Nan marshalled her forces. "Now, girls, pluck up your spirits. Close ranks! Forward —march!" she commanded.

"Wha—what's that?" quavered Lillie Nevin.

"Oh! oh!" from Grace,

"Now, you sawneys!" called the red-haired girl from the rear. "Behave! Don't try to give us all a conniption fit."

"What's that?" demanded one of the other girls.

"Huh! are you seeing things, too?" cried Amelia.

"No. What kind of a fit is a 'conniption'?"

"Don't know," admitted Laura. "But I've heard my grandmother from New England speak familiarly of 'em. What's the matter up front?"

"Oh, Lil and Grace are balking," declared Nan, with disgust. "*Do* come on, children. I have an electric lamp. We sha'n't be entirely in the dark."

"I—I saw something," quavered the flaxen-haired Lillie.

"Oh!" gasped Bess, more than a little inclined herself to be panic-stricken.

"Do come along!" urged Nan.

"There it is!" squealed Grace, suddenly.

Half the girls thought they saw the black figure

dart around the corner of the building; the other half were looking in an entirely different direction at the moment. But all together emitted a chorused:

"Oh!"

"For pity's sake, girls!" gasped Nan. "Don't!"

"It's the ghost! the black ghost!" quavered May Winslow, groveling in the very depths of superstition.

CHAPTER XX

THERE IS A MYSTERY

"It's a black dog!" ejaculated Amelia Boggs. "I reckon there aren't any canine ghosts; are there, Nan?"

The laugh which followed this sally broke the spell of superstition that had clutched some of the girls. Laughter drove away even the fears of May, Lillie and Grace. Bess swallowed hard and laughed, too; but she pinched Nan's arm as she whispered:

"It was that black thing we saw before in the boathouse, Nan."

"All right. Keep it to yourself," urged her chum.

"What are you two whispering about?" complained May. "You didn't get us down here to try to frighten us to death, did you?"

"We're going to give you all a good time, if you'll let us," laughed Nan, cheerfully. "Come on, girls! If we spend so much time outside the boathouse, somebody will be sure to see us."

"And think we're a whole troop of ghosts," chuckled Laura Polk. "Lead on, Macduff!"

"That's not my middle name, but I'll lead," re-

turned Nan promptly, and this time she succeeded in reaching the side door of the boathouse. She drew forth the electric flashlight and pointed it at the lock, so she could see to insert the key.

"Hurry up!" cried Laura, from the rear. "I'm starved to death right now."

"And it's only ten o'clock," somebody else said. "How can that be?"

"I didn't eat any supper," confessed the red-haired girl, unblushingly. "I knew Nan and Bess would supply something better."

"If it's all here," Nan said, as the door swung open.

"Goodness! don't suggest that any of those goodies have been stolen!" cried another girl.

"Maybe that black dog has been in the pantry," chuckled Bess.

"No laughing matter," Laura said. "Look quick, Nancy, dear."

Nan entered in the lead. She flashed her spot light about the big room. There was the row of ice-cream tubs. One of them had its cover off and some of the ice was scattered on the floor. On the other side of the room were the hampers. The covers had been wrenched off two of them and a raid made upon the food they contained.

"Who's been ahead of us?" cried Nan.

"Goodness—gracious—Agnes!" murmured Amelia Boggs.

"Oh! don't tell me you've been robbed!" was the horrified cry of the red-haired girl.

Nan paid little attention to the rifled ice-cream container. She hurried to the hampers. One had been filled with individual salads, each in its paper box. The other had held chicken and anchovy sandwiches.

Several salad containers lay empty on the floor and more had disappeared entirely—been carried away by the thief, or thieves. At least a couple of dozen sandwiches must have been abstracted.

"Goodness!" wailed Bess, right at her chum's shoulder. "What an appetite!"

"For a ghost, I—should—say!" agreed May Winslow.

But Nan did not feel that the occasion was at all funny. This was downright thievery. And she felt quite sure that she knew who had done it.

"That mean, *mean* Linda Riggs!" whispered Nan to Bess.

"Do you really think so?" breathed her chum.

"Who else could it be?" returned Nan, with an emphatic nod. But that was all she said at the time. She hurried to light the big lamp and make the girls welcome. At least the discovered raid on the viands served to banish all fear of the boat-house ghost. Ghosts certainly do not have an appetite for chocolate ice-cream, tuna-fish salad, and chicken sandwiches.

"Start the fire—*do,* Amelia," begged Nan. "Set the plates and knives and forks, Bess. Make yourselves at home, girls. Don't be afraid of starving, Laura. There's *loads* to eat left."

"My mind is relieved by that assurance," said the red-haired girl with a sigh.

Nan had seen to it that each window was curtained and every crevice stopped, so that no light could shine out and play traitor. But the fact that the store of food had been raided disturbed her mind not a little. If Linda Riggs and her chums (for of course the conceited, self-assertive girl did not make the raid alone), played one mean trick, they might another. They might report to some teacher or to Mrs. Cupp, what was going on in the boathouse.

Nan began to realize now that this banquet giving was rather a risky thing. The girls all did it, and it was considered a forgivable offence against Dr. Prescott's rules; but of course the principal desired that the rule against eating after hours should be obeyed, or else she would not have made the regulation.

Nan was rather sorry she had yielded to Bess Harley's suggestion and arranged this banquet. But now being given over heart and hand to the affair, Nan did all she could to make the entertainment a success.

At this distance from the Hall the girls felt free

to let their tongues run, and to laugh and chatter to their hearts' content.

"Oh!" cried May Winslow, "this party is lots nicer than any we ever had in our rooms, for here we do not have to set a watch for Mrs. Cupp, or be so careful how we breathe."

"Only we should set a sentinel on guard against ghosts, May," suggested Laura, wickedly. "That should be your job, honey."

"How mean of you!" squealed May. "I had all but forgotten that horrid black thing we saw."

"It is the ghost of some poor old slave your grandfather owned, Winslow," said one girl. "That is, if it really is a black ghost."

"He wouldn't haunt *me*," returned May, who was from Alabama. "I'm not afraid of any negro, alive or dead! Grandfather Mullin was awfully kind to all his people, and they all loved him. They didn't feel themselves slaves. Our own forefathers were held in bondage by the lords and barons over in England, four or five hundred years ago."

"Oh, say! don't start anything like that here," begged Amelia. "We get enough history I should hope, from Mr. Bonner."

"Right-oh!" yawned Laura, lazily. "Let good fellowship flow with that cocoa that already smells so good; and as we set to work upon the more stable viands——"

"Here! Hold on!" cried Bess. "What are 'stable

viands'? Oats and corn. One would think we were horses."

Just then Nan made the announcement: "Ladies, supper is served." And at that very moment, as the girls crowded to the table and Amelia began to pour the steaming drink, there came a resounding knock upon the door.

"The ghost!" gasped a number of the girls in awed chorus.

"If it is," said Nan Sherwood, vigorously, as the summons was repeated, "he is in full possession of his health and strength."

"It's something worse than a ghost," agreed Laura Polk, grabbing several sandwiches and enveloping them in the folds of her sweater. "But I vow I shall not be cheated out of all my supper."

CHAPTER XXI

"THE BLACK DOG"

NOBODY started for the door for fully a minute, and within that time the knocking was repeated three times. It was not only an imperious rapping; it was plainly inspired by some excitement.

"My goodness!" Amelia Boggs murmured. "That ghost's in an awful hurry."

"He's hungry, maybe," giggled one girl.

"He can't be, if he ate all that he stole before we got here," Bess declared.

Only Nan was silent. She suspected at once what the commanding summons meant. It was a teacher, perhaps Dr. Prescott herself. The party was a failure and all the girls whom she had invited would, with herself and chum, be punished for the frolic.

As she slowly approached the door, a voice from outside faintly reached her ear: "Let me in! open the door!"

Nan was astonished by this. It sounded like somebody in distress. She hurriedly turned the bolt and opened the door a little way. There was a keen wind blowing off the water and the garments of the person on the doorstep fluttered in it, so that

Nan knew at once it was a woman; but she could not see her face.

"Who is it?" whispered Nan, while the other truants held their breath.

"For goodness' sake, let me in, child!" exclaimed a vexed voice and the woman pushed by, slamming the door when once she was inside. It did not need the black veil jerked up over her hat to assure the girls assembled that Mrs. Cupp was under the veil!

"Good-*night*!" murmured Laura, falling dramatically into May Winslow's arms. "'All is lost!' the captain shouted."

"Sh-h!" gasped the girl from Alabama. "Don't make her mad."

"I couldn't," declared the irrepressible. "She was born that way."

But suddenly Nan, as well as some of the other girls, saw that the stern matron of Lakeview Hall had been crying. Her cheeks were tear-stained and she was still sobbing convulsively as she leaned, exhausted, with her back against the door.

Nan was instantly sympathetic, and cried aloud: "What is the matter, Mrs. Cupp? What has happened?"

"I—I'm so frightened," stammered the lady.

"Oh!" whispered Lillie, shrilly. "She's seen the ghost."

"My goodness!" moaned May, almost letting the red-haired girl fall to the floor.

But the latter, after all, was the one who rose to the occasion. Even Nan was too amazed to appreciate properly the fact that for once Mrs. Cupp was in a melting mood.

"Give her a chair, Nan, do!" cried Laura, bestirring herself briskly. "Something has surely upset her. The poor dear! Wish we had a cup of hot tea. But this chocolate is the next best thing to it."

She poured a brimming cup and brought it to Mrs. Cupp, who had been seated at the long table. Before taking the first swallow the lady waved her hand toward the door.

"Lock it!" she gasped.

"It is locked," Nan promptly assured her.

"You can bet it is!" exclaimed the crafty Laura. "We don't want anybody coming in here who will *tell* on us," she added significantly.

Mrs. Cupp must have heard this, for she flushed as she drank the hot chocolate in great gulps. Or, perhaps, it was only the color coming back into her face, after her fright.

Nan asked, with real feeling: "What was it scared you so, Mrs. Cupp?"

"I—I don't know," stammered the matron.

"But it must have been something?"

"I'm not sure even of that," was Mrs. Cupp's rather disconcerting reply.

"It was the ghost, then!" shrilled Lillie.

"Oh!" gasped Grace, and the two timid ones clung together in alarm and despair.

"Oh, shucks!" exclaimed Amelia Boggs. "It won't break the door down to get in here, so don't be afraid."

"I never was so frightened in my life," declared Mrs. Cupp, drinking the last drop of the comforting liquid. "Never!"

"Do tell us all about it, Mrs. Cupp," urged the red-haired girl, hovering about the excited lady. "And have another cup of chocolate; do!"

"Thank you," replied Mrs. Cupp, with real gratitude.

"Come, girls," said the bustling Laura. "The chocolate's all hot. Don't let it spoil. And the sandwiches and salad must be eaten to be saved. Pull up your chairs. Won't you try this lovely salad, Mrs. Cupp? And these chicken sandwiches are delicious."

Mrs. Cupp was fairly caught. She had partaken of the hospitality of the forbidden feast. Having accepted the chocolate she made but weak protest against the heartier viands. A delightfully arranged plateful appeared like magic before her and she found a fork in her hand.

Bess was almost bursting with suppressed laughter, and even Nan had difficulty in keeping a straight

face. Laura Polk had certainly stepped into the breach. "She deserves a leather medal," whispered May Winslow.

"I'll give her one of my clocks," promised Amelia.

The girls gathered quietly about the long table and the food began to disappear. Perhaps they were not quite as hilarious as they expected to be at the feast; but Mrs. Cupp's presence did not make the viands any the less delicious to the palate. And all of the girls were anxious to hear the tale of the matron's fright.

"What could it have been you saw?" May asked.

"I—I don't know. Something black," was the sober reply.

"O-o-o!" from Grace and Lillie. "*All* black?"

"Did it look like a black dog?" asked Nan, the practical.

"I declare! it might have been," Mrs. Cupp said, with some relief. "Of course," she added, with sudden suspicion, "you girls didn't have anybody on watch outside?"

"No. We were too scatterbrained for that," laughed Laura.

"And we did not think our light could be seen through any crack," added Nan.

"It couldn't," Mrs. Cupp said promptly.

"How—how did you know we were here, then?" blurted out Bess.

"Ahem! I knew. That is sufficient," said Mrs. Cupp, more in her usual tone.

Then it was true. Nan knew that somebody had played traitor. Mrs. Cupp had been told of the party in the haunted boathouse by some jealous girl, or she would never have come back to the Hall from the village by the shore road. It was a roundabout way, and lonely.

"The road was very dark," explained the still excited matron. "When I came to the big boulder just the other side of the boat landing, something sprang out of the bushes and chased me. It was black, and looked like a man or boy, only it was on four legs—or its hands and knees."

"Maybe it was a dog," said Bess, doubtfully.

"'The black dog Remorse,' no less!" whispered Laura to Nan. "It was the 'black dog' of Mrs. Cupp's conscience, I guess."

"Hush!" returned Nan. She was worried by the happening. The raid on their feast, the information evidently lodged about their frolic with Mrs. Cupp, and this "black thing" that had startled them all, seemed to be all parts of a plot.

"And it chased me!" Mrs. Cupp went on. "I declare, I never was so frightened in all my life! It chased me right to this door——"

"It really was lucky we were here, then, wasn't it?" put in Laura, to clinch the point.

Mrs. Cupp bit into a chicken sandwich, and

frowned. "I don't know about that," she said slowly. "I never would have come back by the shore road if I hadn't heard of what you girls were doing here. I don't know but that I consider you are the cause of my being so frightened," she concluded grimly.

CHAPTER XXII

PUNISHMENT

Mrs. Cupp proved that she possessed a hearty appetite, and that the fright she had suffered had not impaired it. She accepted a second helping of salad and two plates of ice-cream followed, with several fancy cakes.

"I must say," she observed, in a more cordial mood than any of the girls had ever seen her display before. "I must say that whoever chose these refreshments showed more regard for your digestions than usually is the case in such midnight feasts. And as I remember my own schooldays, we never had anything on such occasions that was really fit for a girl to put in her stomach."

"Oh, Mrs. Cupp!" exclaimed Laura, "did you really have parties like this when you were a girl at boarding school?"

"I was just saying, Laura, that they were *not* like this," returned the matron. "But schoolgirls are all alike, if banquets are not."

The girls giggled at that retort. It did seem

funny to hear Mrs. Cupp joke, in even the grimmest manner.

But Mrs. Cupp was rapidly recovering from her softer mood. Laura said afterward that if it took a ghost-fright to make Mrs. Cupp "livable," if the matron were threatened with the guillotine, for instance, she might really be good company while the effect of the announcement of the coming tragedy lasted.

"I want to know who the guilty party is," said the Lakeview Hall matron. "Who got up this party, and who paid for it?"

"I'm the guilty one," said Nan, promptly. "I must be held solely responsible."

"Oh, no, she is not alone responsible. I helped," cried Bess, "and if Nan is to be punished, I ought to be, too."

"And so did I," Amelia put in. " 'Twon't be fair for only one to be punished."

"And you know," said the red-haired girl, with saucy significance, "we *all* helped eat Nan's lovely supper."

"Ahem! I see the point, Laura," Mrs. Cupp observed. "But it does not change the facts. A rule of the Hall has been broken—flagrantly broken. That you girls fled away to this spot for your reprehensible act adds to the offence. We are responsible to your parents and guardians for your health and safety. The result of an escapade like

this nobody can foretell. Something might have happened in this old boathouse to harm you girls and bring ill-repute to the Hall."

The party of school-law breakers looked rather solemn. Mrs. Cupp folded the napkin she had used and brushed the crumbs from her black broadcloth skirt.

"Nothing excuses an infraction of the rules. But I am inclined to show leniency to everybody but the prime mover in this affair. And that is——"

"Me!" gasped Bess Harley. "Nan would never have thought of having a supper but for me."

"But I chose this place for it, and it was my money paid for it," cried Nan.

"How much did it cost?" asked Mrs. Cupp, briskly.

"More than twenty-five dollars," confessed Nan, blushing.

"Mercy on us! What extravagance!" cried the matron. "You shall be punished for that, if for nothing else, Nancy Sherwood," and she got up quickly. "Now, girls, is there anything left?"

"Some cream and cake, Mrs. Cupp," Amelia promptly announced.

"Take it up to the Hall for Susan and the other maids," ordered the matron. Miss Sherwood, Miss Harley, Miss Polk and Miss Boggs may come down here some time to-morrow and clean up. I will speak to Dr. Prescott about the punishment to be

meted out to the chief offender. She will be vexed about it, I have no doubt."

Laura sidled up to her as the matron prepared to set forth with the truants for the Hall, and whispered:

"But wasn't that mayonnaise lovely, Mrs. Cupp?"

"You cannot cajole me, Miss Polk," the matron said.

This speech gave the fun-makers a feeling of dejection. Most of them did not know how clear Dr. Prescott's sense of justice was. It looked as though Nan Sherwood was in for a lot of trouble. And she had given them such a delightful supper!

It so troubled their minds that even the timid ones thought no more of "the black dog" as they filed out of the boathouse. Nan locked the door, and she and Mrs. Cupp came in the rear as the whole party scuttled up the long flight of steps to the brow of the bluff. Mrs. Cupp walked slowly and leaned upon Nan's arm.

"Don't you know who that was out there in the bushes, Nancy?" the school matron asked.

"No, Mrs. Cupp," declared Nan. "Only I know it couldn't be a ghost."

"How about Grace Mason's brother?"

"Walter?" cried Nan, in surprise.

"Yes. He helped you get those things over from Ricolletti's, didn't he?"

"Ye—es," admitted Nan. She feared that the admission might get Walter into trouble.

"It seems to me like a boy's trick," Mrs. Cupp said reflectively. "I should have stopped to see who it was at the time. But I *was* afraid. My sister and I are in trouble enough as it stands, and I was nervous, I suppose," she added, more to herself than to Nan.

"I'm very sure, Mrs. Cupp, that Walter would not frighten anybody."

"Not if he thought he could save you girls from getting caught?" asked the matron, shrewdly.

"I am quite sure Walter was nowhere near the boathouse at that time," Nan said, with confidence. "I know he telephoned to his sister this evening from their house. Couldn't you call up his mother or father, and find out if he went out again after that time?"

"Good idea! I'll do it," said Mrs. Cupp. "You report to Dr. Prescott to-morrow, after chapel."

This order did not make Nan sleep any more soundly that night. It was quite twelve o'clock when the girls separated under the sharp eye of Mrs. Cupp, and scattered to their rooms. Bess kissed Nan fondly before she crept into her own bed.

"I don't care, Nancy!" she breathed, "we would have had a lovely time if it hadn't been for old Cupp!"

"And the one who set her after us," suggested Nan.

"Oh! who could she be? Linda?"

"We'll never know, I s'pose," said Nan. "I thought at first Linda and her crowd had robbed us."

"Oh!"

"But I guess whoever did that, scared Mrs. Cupp, too."

"The ghost?"

"Yes. If you wish to call him that. But he is a ghost with a big appetite."

"Dear me! that's so, isn't it?" agreed Bess. Well! I—don't—know—ow-oo!" Yawn—sigh—murmur, and Bess was off to the Land of Nod.

Not so Nan. She tossed about for a long time ere she could find oblivion. Her conscience pricked her, and a prickly conscience is just as unhappy a bedfellow as a porcupine would be.

What would "Momsey" and "Papa Sherwood" say if they heard of this escapade? Nan realized that she had done wrong in yielding to the seductive suggestion of the secret supper. She might have given her girl friends a treat in some way that would not have broken the school rules.

She was sorry, very sorry indeed, that she had done this. More than a few tears wet Nan Sherwood's pillow before she finally dropped asleep. Nor had she found relief from this feeling of de-

pression the next morning, when she went alone to Dr. Prescott's office.

This was the first time Nan had been sent to interview the principal of Lakeview Hall for any such reason. She had quite fallen in love with Dr. Beulah Prescott on the evening of her arrival at the school; and Nan Sherwood was of too truly an affectionate disposition to hurt or offend anybody whom she loved.

"Dear, dear, Nancy Sherwood," said the principal, in a worried way. "I never expected to receive such a report about you, of all my new girls. Leader of a party of girls that steals out of the Hall after bedtime, feasts on contraband eatables—Ahem! where's the list of this 'forbidden fruit'? Here it is! Sandwiches, salad, cake, chocolate and coffee, ice-cream. Dear me! dear me! what will your digestions be like if you keep on in this way?"

"I don't know, Dr. Prescott," Nan said faintly, as the preceptress halted for breath.

"I see no pickles, olives or cheese on the bill-of-fare," said the doctor, lowering her lorgnette. "How is that? A schoolgirl picnic without those delectables?"

"My—my money didn't hold out," confessed Nan, her eyes suddenly dancing. Dr. Prescott was not proving so difficult, after all.

"Mrs. Cupp reports only you for punishment,"

said the principal, after a momentary smile. "Don't you think the others deserve punishment, too?"

"No, Dr. Prescott," Nan was prompt to say. "It wouldn't have happened, and the other girls would not have been down there at the boathouse, if it hadn't been for me."

"Well, possibly that may be so. That was Mrs. Cupp's opinion, and we will let it rest at that. Also, Mrs. Cupp recommended you to mercy, Nancy."

This surprised Nan a good deal. She had not thought the stern matron was given at all to mercy.

"Nevertheless, we must show our disapproval of such reprehensible actions," continued Dr. Prescott. "You are sentenced to solitary recreation hours for a week. On your honor, remember. No conversation with the other girls, save in study and recitation hours, until a week from to-day. Remember! Not even with Miss Harley. That is all, Nancy."

CHAPTER XXIII

A STRANGE ADVENTURE

It really seemed awfully funny.

Nan went about with sealed lips save when she had to ask a question of a neighbor in study hour or in class. Even in Room Seven, Corridor Four, there was silence. Bess was at first amused, then disgusted, then indignant.

"Why! whoever heard the like?" she cried. "Not to speak? Goodness! Why, I never had so many things to say to you in my life before, and you sit as dumb as one of those Japanese monkeys," and she pointed to the tiny "Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil" group on Nan's bookshelf.

At first Nan only smiled at her chum's impatience. But soon she found it necessary to steal off by herself during recreation time. The temptation to speak was too great.

Nor did Bess try to make it easier for Nan to keep strictly to the line of punishment that had been inflicted upon her by Dr. Beulah Prescott. Bess began to take a wicked delight in catching her off her guard and getting a word past Nan's lips before she thought.

"Oh bah!" cried the careless Bess. "What does

it matter? We're in our own room. Dr. Beulah knows very well you won't stick to the very letter of her command."

Nan felt differently about it. The principal had trusted her to keep her lips sealed during recreation hours; and she tried as much as possible to keep by herself. "Solitary recreation hours for a week." That was Dr. Prescott's command and Nan did her best to keep away from her fellow-pupils. One afternoon, between her last recitation for the day and suppertime, she went down to Mrs. Cupp with her arms full of summer clothing, for permission to put the frocks away in her trunk.

"Here's your key and the key to the trunk-room. I trust the latter to you, Nancy, because I see you are a girl of honor," Mrs. Cupp said, rather kindly for her. "I see you are trying to obey the doctor's instructions regarding your recreation time. You may stay down there till the supper bell rings, if you like. But remember, if you wish to bring anything up with you from your trunk, you must show it to me."

"Yes Mrs. Cupp," replied Nan, soberly.

This was not the first time she had asked permission to go to her trunk. And she had always chosen a time when no other girls were around, and she could be alone in the trunk-room. She went down stairs rather thoughtfully now. Mrs. Cupp believed she was a girl of honor. Nan was wonder-

ing if, after all, she came up to the requirements for such a person?

"I am not being entirely truthful right now," she thought. "I don't need to go down cellar with these things. I have plenty of room for them in my clothes closet. I am going to my trunk for an entirely different reason.

"I wonder," pursued Nan Sherwood, reflectively, "if all girls are like that? Are we naturally untruthful about little things? Do I know a perfectly frank girl in all this school? Goodness! nobody but poor Amelia Boggs, and she is half-cracked, the other girls say.

"That's why I like Walter," declared Nan, to herself. "I guess that is why I like Cousin Tom—and even Rafe. It's sometimes ugly to speak the brutal truth, I know. But it is never dishonorable. Now am I deliberately acting deceitfully because I did not tell Mrs. Cupp *all* my reason for coming down here?"

Such abstract questions as this often troubled Nan Sherwood. She never discussed them with her chum, or with anybody else, now. But she often wished she could talk them over with her mother, as she used to do. "Momsey" always saw everything so clearly, and always knew just the right and wrong of things.

"And it's so hard sometimes," Nan murmured, "to tell what is right and what is wrong!"

She snapped on the electric light nearest to her trunk. The receptacles were in rows, each with a card on which the owner's name was clearly written. Nan's was in a corner at the end of the main building nearest the unfinished part. She had come down a passage from the stairway to get to the trunk-room. This part of the cellar was a long way from the kitchen and scullery.

Some of the girls were afraid to come to the trunk-room alone, although their imagination had not yet peopled this part of the Hall with ghosts. Nan thought of nothing, when she had raised the lid of her trunk, but one thing. She carefully put aside the empty trays and the layers of clothing hiding the long box at the bottom of the trunk.

It was locked with a little brass padlock. Tom Sherwood had made the box very neatly and nobody could possibly open the receptacle without the key, unless the box were broken. Nan wore the tiny key in a little leather bag, on a chain of fine gold links which had been her mother's when she was a little girl in Memphis.

Nan quickly unlocked the box and raised the cover. A rush of sweet smelling herb-odors burst forth. It was the combined odor of the tamarack swamp of upper Michigan (or so it seemed), where Nan had spent the past summer. She lifted aside the covering of tissue paper, and revealed a great, pink-cheeked, blue-eyed, beautiful doll!

It was as large as a real baby, and it was dressed elegantly. Nan's mother, with her own frail hands, had made all the garments "Beautiful Beulah" wore.

"Beulah, *dear*!" murmured Nan, hugging the doll up tight to her bosom and rocking herself to and fro as she sat upon the floor. "It's just like going home again, to see you. Wouldn't you like to see our dear little room in the 'dwelling in amity'? If only we could fly back there, really! Only for just an hour! And have Momsey and Papa Sherwood at home, too, and all be together again!"

Nan choked up at this and the tears began to flow. But she crowded them back in a moment. "Oh! this will never do—this will never do," she cried, under her breath. "I'll only make you feel bad, too, my dear, darling Beautiful Beulah. And, goodness me!" added Nan Sherwood, suddenly becoming practical, "what would Dr. Beulah think if she heard me? She would perhaps think I had named you after her. I'm not sure that a principal of a great school like this would want to be godmother to a doll.

"I don't care! I guess that's why I love her so much—because she bears the same name as you, my dear. And you'd love her, too, if you could know her. Oh, dear! I wonder if I did wrong in hiding you down here in the bottom of my trunk? Mrs. Cupp certainly wouldn't have taken you away from me. The girls might have made fun, and Bess, I

s'pose, would have been difficult. But I'd have felt better to have you up stairs in Number Seven, Corridor Four——"

A step in the passage outside the open trunk-room door! Nan rose up in a panic, clutching Beulah to her breast. Somebody was coming.

There was not time to put the doll back into her nest and successfully hide her. The wall at the end of the cellar was of heavy planking. A pile of empty dry-goods cases stood at hand, a narrow alley having been left between the tiers of boxes and the plank wall.

Nan darted behind this screen of boxes, the doll in her arms. She slipped on something in the dark passage and was flung with considerable force against the plank partition. To her amazement and alarm, a narrow section of the partition moved out, dropping downward and outward from the top, as though it were hinged at the bottom.

This narrow door was weighted, so it could not fall abruptly. Nan was flung sprawling upon it, and lay there with her doll, as the shutter dropped quietly to a horizontal position.

She knew she lay over some deep cistern, or the like, and that the plank door bridged it. It was pitch-dark behind the partition and a sour, damp smell, like the odor of an old brewing cellar, rose to her nostrils. Nan Sherwood, startled as she was, uttered no outcry.

CHAPTER XXIV

AN UNEXPECTED MISFORTUNE

As Nan lay on the secret drawbridge, she heard a stealthy footstep on the cement floor of the trunk-room. The step was light, and, plainly, there was but one person approaching. It must be one of the girls. Certainly it could not be Mrs. Cupp, for she was heavy-footed. Nan wished she had not been so foolish as to run, for she was really frightened because of her position over the old cistern. If the intruder was only one of the other girls, coming to open a trunk, she could easily have hidden the doll behind the boxes and waited until the girl had gone up stairs again before putting Beautiful Beulah properly away in her nest.

In a few minutes Nan sat up and began to creep off the dropped door. As her weight was gradually removed from it, the weights began to raise the door into its usual position. There must have been some secret fastening to hold the door shut, that was broken when Nan's weight was cast against the plank wall.

Her fall had been just at the right place to start the door swinging downward. Now, when she

carefully stepped away from the partition, having risen to her full height, the secret door swung up and closed tightly. She could not feel its edge on either side with her fingers.

But that was not what she was most interested in just then. The secret door puzzled her, but the step in the cellar impressed Nan as being of more importance. She peered around the tiers of boxes to see the other girl.

It was Linda Riggs.

The trunks belonging to those girls whose names began with "R" were right next to those whose owners' names commenced with "S." The electric bulb near Nan's trunk gave Linda light enough for her purpose. Nan saw her take a key from her purse and open her trunk with it.

That would not have been surprising, only for the fact that the key had no tag attached to it, such as Mrs. Cupp fastened to all the trunk keys left in her charge. Nan saw that Linda watched the door of the trunk-room sharply as she rummaged to the bottom of her trunk. The girl was evidently down here without Mrs. Cupp's knowledge, and was afraid of being caught.

"That's another key!" Nan whispered to herself. "Why! she owns two and Mrs. Cupp doesn't know it."

She watched Linda without saying a word.

Linda, on the other hand, paid no attention to Nan's open trunk. Seeing no other girl about, probably led her to believe that whoever had been in the trunk-room ahead of her had carelessly gone out, leaving her trunk open, and the door open and the lamp lit, as well.

Linda soon obtained the article she desired—a small, flat parcel—and with this, after relocking her trunk, she went away. Nan was curious enough to watch to see how Linda went up stairs. Surely she had not come down past Mrs. Cupp's open door.

That suspicion was verified when Nan saw Linda turn into the pasage leading to the kitchen. It was an hour in the afternoon when one might pass up the kitchen stairs without being observed by the busy women preparing supper. Besides, as Linda was always giving presents to the servants, they might be conveniently blind to her movements. Nan went back with Beulah and put her carefully away in the box at the bottom of the trunk. The mystery of the secret door was overshadowed in her mind by the actions of Linda Riggs.

"I guess we're all deceivers," Nan considered. "I'm deceitful myself. And Linda Riggs is positively dishonorable. Mrs. Cupp would be very angry if she knew Linda was down here without permission and had a private key to her trunk.

"And all we girls seem to be just delighted to break the rules, or try to fool the teachers. It really is dreadful! I guess we all must think that rules are made only to be broken.

"Oh, dear! perhaps if there were no laws none of us would care to go wrong," concluded Nan, perhaps striking the key-note of all human frailty.

She went rather soberly up stairs and delivered her own trunk-key and the door-key to the matron, who she was glad asked her no questions. The afternoon mail had just arrived. May Winslow was acting as postmistress for the week, and the girls were crowding about the office table on which May had sorted the letters.

Either Dr. Prescott or Mrs. Cupp had run through the mail first. Letters from home were never held up. Suspicious looking letters had to be opened in the matron's presence. Nan's only missive this day was an unexpected one from Scotland.

She had grown to know just how the foreign mails were carried and when to look for a letter bearing the Emberon postmark. Somehow, this unexpected epistle frightened Nan.

She hurried up to Room Seven, Corridor Four, to read the letter alone. Her chum was not there and for once Nan was glad of that. Sitting by the window where the light was fading, Nan opened her letter.

"My dearest child:—

"Since writing you day-before-yesterday, we have received quite a shock. Your dear father is in such a state of mind that he cannot write to you about it. I am calm myself, dearest Nan, because I know that our Heavenly Father will not see us troubled more greatly than we can bear.

"I have, all the time, had perfect confidence in the final adjustment of Mr. Hughie Blake's estate and the establishment of our clear title to it. It seemed as though this already was a fact. But a new difficulty has arisen. Just as Mr. Andrew Blake was about to take possession of the property in our name, a court order restrained him. A new branch of the family, at least, a newly discovered claimant by the name of Blake, has appeared. There are two sisters, maiden ladies, who claim that their mother was married to a man named Hugh Blake, who afterward separated from her. They have only recently found their mother's marriage lines and their own birth certificates, proving the marriage and their own title to any property of which their father may have died possessed.

"Mr. Andrew Blake pooh-poohs this claim as he did the others. He is positive that Mr. Hughie Blake was never married. He was, in fact, notoriously a woman-hater. But while the Laird of Emberon was on his Continental travels many years ago, his steward, Hughie Blake, was for two years

away from Castle Emberon. These two years correspond with the years in which these Blake sisters claim their father lived with their mother in a North of England shire.

"This is the story, dear Nan, the details of which will not interest you much, only as they affect our financial situation. We are greatly in Mr. Andrew Blake's debt at the present time. Your father is writing by this mail to the lawyer in Tillbury to raise money on our little home by a mortgage to pay these debts and to pay your school bills for the remainder of the year.

"This holding up of our fortune is only temporary, I am sure. I am trusting in our Father's goodness still. I will not be alarmed. But the delay worries your poor papa very much. Our friends here are very kind to us, and Mr. Andrew Blake urges us to accept his financial aid again; but Papa Sherwood can be, you know, the most stubborn of men when he wants to be."

There was more of the letter—intimate, tender passages that Nan could have shown to nobody. Her mother's heart was opened wide to the girl, as it always was when they were together. "Momsey" and she had been much more intimate than mothers and little daughters usually are. Mrs. Sherwood now confided in Nan as she would have done had they been at home together.

The hour darkened, and Nan could no longer see to read as she sat by the window. She put the letter away and bathed her eyes and face before turning on the light.

In fact, she was still in the dark when Bess came romping in. Nan seemed no more quiet to Bess than she had for several days.

"I declare!" cried Bess. "I'd just as soon room with a funeral mute, as with a girl who won't talk. You're the limit, Nan Sherwood!" and she went off to join some of the girls who were under no ban of silence.

CHAPTER XXV

RUMOR BLOWS ABOUT

Bess Harley was not at all a heartless girl; and she really loved Nan devotedly. But she could not understand just why her chum was so particular in her honorable observance of the sentence of silence. Nor did she know anything about the very upsetting letter Nan had received from Scotland. Finding Nan far from gay on this particular evening, and being fond of bustle and excitement herself, Bess deserted Number Seven, Corridor Four, and found amusement in the companionship of other girls who could talk.

Nan was unhappy; yet she was glad to be left to herself. She faithfully prepared her tasks for the next day, and then put out the light and sat by the window, looking out into the starlit night.

From her window she had an unobstructed view of the top of the flight of steps leading to the shore, as well as the blinking light on the point and the many windows of a lake steamer going past.

Of late the water had grown too cold for swimming, and boating was not so popular as it had

been. The keen winds sometimes blew over the lake and into the school cove, foretelling the winter which was steadily approaching from the Canadian side.

Besides, as the term progressed, the school tasks for the girls became more arduous. Dr. Prescott began the year cautiously; but when she once had her girls "into their stride," as she called it, she pushed them hard. There was less and less time for sport and recreation for those girls who desired to stand well in the monthly reports sent home to parents or guardians.

Girls like Linda Riggs and most of her friends, did not seem to care what their reports were. But Nan felt differently; and even careless Bess had ambition to please the folks at home.

As Nan sat at the window on this evening, however, she wondered if it greatly mattered, after all, what she did—whether she studied, or not. For the letter from Scotland had made the girl very hopeless, indeed. She could not, for this once, at least, feel the uplift of "Momsey's" hopeful nature. She feared that the fortune which, like a will-o'-the-wisp, had danced before their eyes for so many months, was now about to disappear in a Morass of Despair. The little "dwelling in amity" mortgaged! That seemed to Nan a most terrible thing.

And "Papa Sherwood" and "Momsey" would

have to come home, and "Papa Sherwood" would have to take up the search for work again which had so clouded their lives during the first weeks of this very year.

With the outlook on life of a much older person, Nan saw all these approaching difficulties, and they loomed up mountain high in her imagination. After the joy of believing poverty was banished forever from their lives, it seemed to be marching upon them with a more horrid mien than ever.

All the money that could possibly be raised upon the cottage on Amity Street would barely bring her parents home and pay the remainder of her year's tuition at Lakeview Hall. Nan knew how much the latter would be, and there rose in her heart a determination. It would be impossible to get any of the half year's tuition money back—that which had been already paid; but her father would not have to pay the remainder of the fee if she left school at the mid-winter holidays.

And this would she do. "Papa Sherwood" should not be troubled by that expense! If she only had not recklessly expended that whole five-pound note for the spread in the haunted boathouse!

Over spilled milk, however, there was little use to cry. Extravagances must stop right here and now.

By and by Nan slipped out of her clothes, braided her hair in the dark, and got into bed long before the retiring bell rang. When Bess came in, her

chum made a pretense of being asleep, and in her heart thought: "More deceit!"

But Nan felt she could not listen to Bess' chatter on this night.

She arose early in the morning, after an uneasy night, and while the steam was knocking its usual morning tattoo in the radiators (the girls said Mrs. Cupp never reported that annoyance to the engineer, for it served to make even the "lazybones" of the school rise promptly) Nan sat by the window, through which the cold light stole, and began a reply to her mother's letter. She had written a page and a half when the gong sounded and Bess sleepily crept out of bed.

"Hul-lo!" Bess yawned.

Nan could merely nod to her.

"Oh, gracious goodness me!" cried Bess. "This is the last day you've got to keep your mouth closed, I should hope! I never did see such a stubborn girl in my life before! If I had been as dumb as you have been this week, I know I should never be able to speak again."

Nan smiled at this; though to tell the truth, even that was hard work. To leave beautiful Lakeview Hall, and all the girls whom she loved, and the teachers, including Dr. Beulah and Professor Krenner!

Tears blinded her eyes. She could no longer see to write. She did not want to stain the pages

with tears, for then "Momsey" would know just how bad she really felt. She jumped up, bathed her eyes with cold water, and finished her own toilet.

"You look just as though you had hay-fever, Nan," Bess grumbled. "But as you can't have that at this time of year, I believe you have been crying."

Her chum did not admit this by either word or look. She put on her cap and coat and ran out for some exercise before breakfast. Bess never indulged in such a thing. She always dressed so slowly that she did not have time for a walk or a run before the breakfast bell sounded.

She did, on this morning, however, think to open the window before she left Room Seven, and left the corridor door open, too. Immediately a draft of air sucked through the room and blew Nan's uncompleted letter to her mother out of doors. The result of this mischance was more important than one would have thought.

In the first place, Cora Courtney chanced to be walking briskly in the snowy garden. The thin white coverlet that had shrouded the walks and lawn overnight, crisped under her footsteps as she tramped along. Down fluttered Nan's unfinished letter right in Cora's path. Of course, Cora picked it up and it was only natural that she should look at it to see what it was.

"Goodness! Can this be *so*?" murmured Cora.

after a glance down the written lines on the first page. "Oh! Dear me!"

She was not a hard-hearted girl at all. And Nan Sherwood had never done any wrong to Cora, or said anything to her that was not kindly. Cora had no reason whatsoever for wishing the girl from Tillbury ill. So, naturally, she was sorry to learn that such serious trouble had come upon her schoolmate.

Under other influences than those that had shaped her course ever since she had come to Lakeview Hall, Cora would have been a very different girl. Her people were really very poor. Her father was addicted to drink and his family suffered thereby. Her mother had come of a well-to-do family; but her relatives had almost all turned against her when she married Mr. Courtney.

One aunt, however, remembered the oldest of the Courtney children, and offered to educate Cora. Instead of sending the girl to a school where she would have been quickly and efficiently trained to earn her own living, the foolish aunt sent her to this exclusive finishing school for young ladies.

Every one about her had more money than poor Cora Courtney. Her clothing was barely sufficient. Dr. Prescott, out of her own pocket, delicately supplied the poor girl with some absolute necessities.

Thus feeling the nip of poverty all the time, Cora was easily tempted to join the clique of parasites

who gathered around the free-handed, but unpleasant, Linda Riggs. They all toadied to Linda, ran errands for her, and as Laura Polk tartly said, "performed all the duties of the Roman populace as Linda, as a female Cæsar, demanded."

Now Cora was immediately moved to pity by what she had discovered in Nan Sherwood's unfinished letter. She could appreciate the sting of poverty, and knew how she should feel herself if her great aunt abruptly cut off the tuition fees. And in this case Nan seemed to be giving up all from a sense of duty.

Her heart told Cora to run to Nan with the letter and tell her how sorry she was; but her head advised her to take an entirely different course. And Cora had learned to let her head guide her, and not her heart.

There was still time before breakfast, and Cora hurried up to the room which she shared with Linda. It was in an entirely different part of the building from that where Nan and Bess lodged, and was a larger and much better-furnished apartment, with a private bath attached, put in at Mr. Riggs' cost for his daughter. Cora Courtney was considered very lucky by their special clique to be Linda's roommate, and she did not mind playing maid to the haughty Linda for the privilege of sharing in the luxuries of the apartment.

"Oh, Linda! Look what I've found!"

"I don't care what it is!" snarled the purse-proud girl, as she stood before the mirror. "I can't make my hair come right. It's all in a tangle."

She was sleepy and cross, and her scanty brown hair was in a snarl. "You'll have to help me, Cora," she added.

"You ought to get up when the gong strikes; then you wouldn't have to be helped," said Cora, who wanted to shirk an unpleasant service if she could.

"If I got up at five o'clock it wouldn't be any better," whined Linda. "It's always in a snarl!"

"Then why don't you braid it nicely when you go to bed? You fall right into bed with your hair in a regular rat's nest!"

"I'm so-o tired then," yawned Linda. Come! be a friend and help me. I should think you would."

"Goodness! I don't like to fix hair any better than you do," snapped Cora, coming unwillingly to the task.

"Go on and be a good child," said Linda, more cajoling than usual. "I'm going to give you that corral necklace of mine to wear to the Grand Guard Ball tomorrow night."

"Oh, Linda! are you truly?" gasped Cora, seizing the hairbrush with avidity at this promise.

"Yes. I know you like it."

"But you won't have any necklace to wear yourself!"

"Oh, yes, I will. Don't fear," said Linda, looking very shrewd and nodding emphatically.

Cora stood aside and looked at her closely.

"You don't mean——?" she gasped.

"Never mind what I mean, Miss," replied Linda, shortly. "You go on with your work."

"You never mean to wear that beautiful necklace of your grandmother's?" Cora amazedly inquired.

"Don't I just?" returned Linda, tossing her head. "Ouch!"

"Don't pull, then," said Cora calmly.

"Oh! you're awfully mean!" cried Linda, tears in her eyes.

"You're just fooling. You couldn't get the necklace without Mrs. Cupp's knowing it, and you know very well she declared last term that no girl should wear such an expensive thing at Lakeview Hall."

"Don't you bother, Miss. Mrs. Cupp isn't omnipotent," said Linda, more placidly. "And the Grand Guard Ball is not held at the Hall, thank goodness! You shall wear the corral necklace. It looks pretty next to the black lace in the neck of your gown. And it shall be yours to keep if you're a good girl. Now! what's all this you tried to tell me when you came in? I'm awake now," said Linda, luxuriating under Cora's deft hands.

Cora thrust the unfinished letter which she had found before Linda's eyes.

"Nan Sherwood's writing!" gasped Linda, pouncing on it at once. She read aloud:

"Dearest Momsey:—

"I love you! love you! And I wish I were where you are, or you were where I am. I'd love to let down your beautiful hair and brush it and make it all pretty again, as I used. I am so, *so* lonely for you and Papa Sherwood that I don't so much mind if you don't ever get any of that money and have to come home, and we are poor again in 'the little dwelling in amity.' I so very much want to see you both that I hope you will come back from Scotland right away and we shall meet in dear old Tillbury and not have to be separated any more.

"I am thankful to you and Papa Sherwood for sending me to this nice school; and I enjoy it, and if everything were all right, I'd dearly love to stay. But I am so *hungry* for a sight of you that I'll gladly give up school.

"And that is just what I must do, dear Momsey, and you must make Papa Sherwood agree. I won't let him spend any of that money he will have to raise on mortgage to pay the other half year's fees here. No, indeed!"

The letter ended there. Had Cora not been so much under Linda's influence she would have cried a bit over the tender lines Nan had written.

But Linda fairly exulted over the information which the letter gave.

"Isn't that great," she demanded excitedly. "Now we'll fix that Nan Sherwood! Got to leave, and her folks aren't going to be rich, after all! I don't suppose there was ever any chance of it, anyway. It was just talk. Ha! the nasty little thing. This will just fix her!"

And Nan, all that last day of silence, went about wondering why many of the girls looked so oddly at her, and especially Linda Riggs' group. They laughed, and made supposedly funny speeches which were evidently aimed at Nan, but which she did not understand.

Rumor was blowing about, and before Bess Harley had any of the particulars from her chum of the calamity that had befallen, the whole school practically knew that Nan Sherwood's folks "were poor as church mice."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GRAND GUARD BALL

Bess was in a terrible state of mind when the news was told to her. She told Nan before supper-time that the girls were saying awful things, and she wanted to know what it meant. The fact that Nan was still bound by Dr. Prescott's sentence of silence made no difference to Bess.

"You've got to tell me what it means, or I'll never speak to you again, so there!" cried Bess. "How is it your own chum never knows anything about your secrets, and other girls do? It's a horrid shame!"

Nan, much troubled herself now, having discovered the loss of her unfinished letter, ran off to the principal and begged to be relieved of her sentence of silence. "Else I shall lose my dearest friend!" she told Dr. Prescott, quite wildly. "Something has happened that I *must* tell her about, dear Dr. Prescott! I *must*!"

"'Must' is a hard master, Nancy," said the principal, softly. "Are you in trouble?"

"Yes, Dr. Prescott," admitted Nan, almost sobbing.

"Can I help you at all, my dear?"

"No! Oh, thank you, no! Oh! it's nothing to do with my own self here at school; but it is about my father and my mother. They—they are having some trouble in Scotland."

"I see, my dear," said Dr. Prescott, quietly. "I hope it is not as bad as you evidently think. But whatever it is, remember that I am always ready to help my girls if I can. There may be something later that I can do."

"Thank you! thank you, so much, Dr. Prescott!" Nan cried, putting up her lips for the warm kiss the preceptress gave her. "And I may speak to Bess?"

"I absolve you from further silence. I think you will remember this punishment," said the principal, with a smile.

Then Nan went back and told Bess all. The two girls read Mrs. Sherwood's letter again and again, and Bess declared that Nan should not leave Lakeview Hall, no matter what happened about the Scotch legacy. "My father will pay for you to stay here with me, Nan Sherwood. You know he will."

Nan would not argue this point. They had talked that over to a conclusion long before circumstances had made it possible for Nan to attend the school. With all her desire for an education, Nan was the soul of independence. She knew now just what

she would do. Her parents could not get home much before the Christmas holidays, and Nan determined to go to Tillbury to them when they reached there, and at once get a certificate from Mr. Mangel, the high-school principal, and try to secure a position in some store in Tillbury. She told Bess, to that young lady's disgust and alarm, that she must help support the family and help her father pay off the mortgage that would have to be put on the little cottage on Amity Street.

"I think it's just as mean as it can be!" sobbed Bess, fairly given up to woe. "And we were going to have such fun this winter. And Dad's almost promised that we should have a nice boat next spring. Oh, dear me, Nan Sherwood! Something always is happening to you to stir us all up!"

At another time Nan would have laughed at this way of expressing it; but she found no food for laughter in anything now. The girls who were closest to her, and loved her, were just as tender and kind as their several natures suggested. Grace Mason cried outright and her eyes were swollen and red the next morning when Walter ran over in the motor car to see her.

"What's the matter, Sis?" he demanded. "Who's been picking on you now?"

"Sh! Nobody. Nan and Bess and Laura wouldn't let them," his sister confessed. "But it's Nan—in *such* trouble!"

She related what she knew of the circumstances, and Walter was deeply impressed by the story.

"Go ahead and get Nan, and we'll take a little spin," suggested the boy.

While his sister ran to ask permission, and to find Nan, Linda Riggs came along and stopped, as always, to speak to Walter.

"How is it you never take us girls to ride any more, as you used to last term?" asked the rich girl, smiling winningly on Walter.

"I—I don't have much time," stammered the boy, awkwardly. "Tutors, you know, and all that. Awfully busy."

"Yes—you—are!" laughed Cora, who was with her friend. "We see you on the roads, flying by."

Just then Grace appeared.

"Here we are, Walter!" she cried. "We're all ready."

"Oh! all right," answered the boy, and got out quickly to crank up.

"Linda tossed her head as Nan followed Grace down the front steps. "That is what it means, eh?" she whispered to Cora. "That poverty-stricken Nan Sherwood! I wonder if Walter knows he's taking out a pauper in that handsome car."

"Oh! maybe Nan isn't quite a pauper," said Cora doubtfully.

"Yes, she is! And a thief! Or, she tried to be——"

"You know Mrs. Cupp warned you about repeating that story, Linda," said Cora, hastily.

"Well! just the same there'll be another story to tell," muttered Linda, watching the automobile party get under way with envious eyes. "I'll just fix that Nan Sherwood; you see!"

In the automobile Walter found time to say to Nan, when Grace could not hear: "I'm awfully sorry you're in trouble, Nan. I wish I could help you. We all like you tremendously. You know that, don't you?"

"I believe you mean it, Walter," said Nan, winking fast to keep back the tears. "And it's just *dear* of you to say so. Thanks!" and Nan pressed the boy's offered hand warmly.

The Grand Guard Ball, a social event that shook Freeling and the surrounding towns to their social centre, was to be held on this evening. The older girls of Lakeview Hall were usually allowed to attend the assembly under the care of one or two teachers. Sometimes Dr. Beulah Prescott herself attended the ball.

Nan did not really care to go; but Bess insisted, and would not go without her. Mrs. Harley had seen to it that both girls had pretty party dresses, and these compared well with the frocks worn by the other girls who filled Charley's old omnibus and the several automobiles that transported the pupils from Lakeview Hall to the ball.

Linda Riggs wore a frock as unfitted for her age as Mrs. Cupp would allow. It was noticed, too, that Linda did not wear the pretty coral necklace she had displayed so frequently during the term. That was around Cora's pretty throat, while Linda's neck was bare of any ornament. Mrs. Cupp did not attend the assembly on this occasion. She hurried off to the village early in the evening, having received a note from her sister, Miss Vane. Some of the girls said that Mrs. Cupp and her sister were in trouble over an orphan boy whom Miss Sadie Vane had once taken to bring up.

"He was more like a bond-slave than an adopted son, I reckon," Susan told Laura Polk, in her gossipy way. "If you gals yere think Mrs. Cupp is a Tartar, yo'd ought to have some 'sperience with Miss Sadie Vane. I wo'ked fo' her once. Never again!"

"What's happened to the boy?" Laura asked.

"He done run away, and now it tu'ns out that there's money comin' to him an' the 'thorities want to know whar he done gone. It's makin' Miss Vane a sight of trouble—an' sarve her right!"

This story Laura, of course, told to her chums; but nobody expressed any sorrow for Mrs. Cupp but Nan. The latter could not help but feel that, after all, the matron had shown her some kindness, even if she had told Dr. Prescott about the boat-house banquet.

Dr. Prescott did not herself attend the Grand Guard Ball. Mademoiselle Loro was very near-sighted, and Miss Gleason, the physical culture instructor, who also went to chaperon the girls, was not of an observant nature.

Therefore, when Linda Riggs suddenly blazed out in all the glory of a diamond and ruby necklace in an old-fashioned setting "more fit," as Amelia Boggs said, "for a Choctaw princess to wear than a white girl!" there really was nobody to forbid the display.

People remarked about it, however. It was plainly a family heirloom and very valuable. If it was done to advertise Mr. Riggs' wealth, it was in poor taste, and Dr. Prescott certainly would be greatly displeased if she heard of Linda's action. However, nobody had any concern about that unless it was Linda herself.

The girls enjoyed every minute they were allowed to remain at the ball. Each girl was allowed three dances, and the question of partners was a burning one.

Walter Mason had done yeoman's duty in this matter. He knew every youth who attended the ball. He was indefatigable in introducing them to his sister and the other girls from the Hall. Even Amelia had partners for her three dances.

In fact, only one girl missed the full complement of dances. That was Linda. She was so angry

with Walter that she refused to let him introduce any of his friends, and in return Walter did not ask her to dance at all. So the Linda Riggs' clique, and Nan and the Masons, were very much at odds when they went back to the hall at ten o'clock.

The necklace disappeared from Linda's neck before the Hall was reached. But in the morning, at breakfast time, it appeared again in a most surprising bit of gossip. Around the tables went the rumor, flying from lip to lip:

"Linda's beautiful necklace is gone! She's in her room in tears and will not be comforted. She declares it has been stolen."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HUMILIATION OF LINDA

EARLY in the morning after the Grand Guard Ball in Freeling, Nan Sherwood had an adventure.

She had spent part of the previous day writing another letter to her mother, and that she finished, sealed, stamped and mailed in the school letter-bag. This time she knew that no ill-natured girl would get hold of it. But, of course, the whole school knew by this time that she was going to leave at the end of the term, and that "her folks weren't rich at all, so there!"

Not that Nan had ever talked about the Scotch legacy more than she could help; and certainly she had not boasted to the girls of her wealth. There are certain natures, however, who envy the successful, and Nan had been very successful in making friends, in finding favor with the teachers, and in standing well in her classes.

So even some girls whom she had been kind to, were glad to repeat now the story of Nan Sherwood's coming poverty as first circulated by Linda Riggs and her satelites. Nan had heard many un-

kind whispers, and when alone she grieved over this.

By reason of her fretting, she did not sleep well after the ball, and she arose long before the gong sounded and when it was still quite dark. There was a paring of silver moon low on the horizon, which looked as though it had been sewed into the black velvet robe of Night; and the robe was trimmed with sparkling silver and red stars as well.

The air was keen, although there was no wind; and the hoarfrost hung from the bushes and dried grass-blades, while there was a rime of it the length of the ballustrade to the beach. Nan ran down this flight to see if the ice would bear yet. Skating was in the offing, and she and Bess loved to skate.

Professor Krenner had reported the day before that the strait between the lake shore where his cabin stood, and the Isle of Hope, half a mile out in the lake, was skimmed over with ice. Here, at the foot of the flight of stairs and along by the haunted boathouse, the edge of the water was fringed with a crust of thin ice.

"Not much more fun for me at dear old Lakeview Hall," Nan was thinking as she skipped lightly along the edge of this uncertain ice. "But I'll get my skates sharpened, as Bess begged me. That will not be a *great* extravagance. We'll have some good fun before the term closes and we go home for the holidays. Oh, dear!"

The sigh was not because of the home-going. It

was for the reason that Nan felt very sure that she would never see the Hall again.

Just as she was thinking this and watching idly the broken water far out in the strait toward the Isle of Hope, she put her foot upon a strip of ice and, to her amazement, it broke through and she plunged knee deep in the icy water.

"Oh! *Oh!* OH!" she gasped, in graduated surprise.

For as she strove to pull out the first foot, her other one went—*slump!*—right through the ice, too. And it was cold!

Nan was not frightened at first. She was an athletic girl, and very strong and agile. But she was amazed to find that both feet were fast in the half-frozen slime at the bottom of this hole into which she had stepped. She strove to pull her feet free, and actually could not do it!

Then, as she lifted her head to look about for help, she saw a figure in black running hard toward her. It came from the rear of the big boathouse. It was a slight figure, and Nan immediately thought of "the black dog" that had chased Mrs. Cupp the night of the boathouse party.

"I'll get you! I'll get you!" exclaimed the boy, for such in reality he was, and he threw forward a tough branch for Nan to cling to.

She accepted this aid gladly. At first she almost drew him into the water. Then he braced his heels

in the bank and flung himself back to balance her weight. First one foot and then the other Nan pulled out of the icy mire, and in half a minute she was ashore.

"Oh! how can I thank you?" she cried. "If you hadn't been here——"

"It's all right—it's all right, Miss," the boy stammered, and immediately began to back away. "You needn't thank me. I'd have done it for anybody."

Nan was eyeing the lad curiously. Many thoughts beside those of gratitude for his timely help, were passing through her mind.

"Who are you?" she asked abruptly. "Do you live around here?"

The boy was a pale youth, but he flushed deeply now and edged farther away, as though he really feared her.

"Oh, yes! I live near here. I—I'm glad I could help you. Good-bye!"

Before Nan could stop him by word or act, he turned around and ran up the shore of the lake until he was hidden from the girl's surprised view.

"Well! isn't that the strangest thing?" demanded Nan, of nobody at all. Then she realized that she was getting very cold indeed, standing there with wet feet and ankles, and she herself started on a run for the steps to the top of the bluff, and had just time enough to get to the Hall and change her shoes and stockings before breakfast.

At the table she was giving to Bess an eager account of her adventure when Laura Polk said to the chums from Tillbury:

"Heard the latest, girls?"

"Don't know. What is the latest?" asked Bess. "Nan's got a yarn to tell that almost passes human belief. She seems to have interviewed a ghost and got her feet wet at the same time."

"That's nothing," declared Laura. "Linda's lost that beautiful necklace."

"Goodness! you don't mean it?" gasped Bess.

"The poor girl!" exclaimed Nan, with sympathy. "How did it happen?"

"The deponent knoweth not," said Laura, lightly. "It's a big loss—bigger than that awful maxim Miss Craven used to teach all us girls: 'Lost! Somewhere between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with sixty diamond minutes. No reward is offered, for they are gone forever!' "

"How ridiculous!" chuckled Bess.

"It is no laughing matter, girls," said Nan, with gravity.

"What isn't; the maxim?" cried Bess.

"No. Linda's loss."

"Pooh! What do I care?" scoffed Bess. "I'm wasting no tears over Linda."

"But that lovely necklace!" cried Nan.

"It was a beauty," admitted Laura.

"Oh! her father won't mind. He has more money

than anybody else in the world—to hear her tell it," laughed the heartless Bess.

"She can't help being foolish, I suppose," added Laura.

"She showed how silly she was by wearing the necklace," Bess declared. "Maybe a burglar saw it, and followed her home, and stole it."

Mrs. Cupp rang her bell sharply. "Young ladies!" she exclaimed, when there was comparative silence. "Young ladies! Attention! Miss Sherwood is wanted in Dr. Prescott's office at once."

Many of the girls stared at Nan as she slowly arose, her breakfast partly eaten. More than one whisper went around the tables. One girl asked right out loud:

"Wonder what Dr. Prescott wants her for?"

"I know!" squealed the eager voice of one of the younger pupils. "I came right past Linda Riggs' door, and I heard her say to Cora Courtney that she knew Nan stole that necklace!"

"Oh!" The exclamation was general. But Amelia Boggs' voice rose above the confusion.

"You miserable infant!" she cried. "You ought to be spanked and put to bed for a week!"

"Young ladies!" came in Mrs. Cupp's stern voice, "less confusion, please!"

Nan had risen in some trepidation to go to the principal's study. But the suggestion that she was

wanted because Linda had lost her necklace almost bound her feet where she stood. It seemed to Nan as though she could not move.

"Nan! Nan!" cried Bess, jumping up, her face ablaze. "It's a story, a wicked story! They sha'n't treat you so!"

Her arm was over Nan's shoulders and she was crying, frankly. Mrs. Cupp's voice again was heard above the noise.

"Elizabeth! Sit down!"

The reckless Bess paid no attention to the command, but went on with Nan to the door. This flagrant disobeying of the matron's order awed the other girls to silence.

Bess left her chum in the hall and came back, her eyes streaming.

"I don't care what you do to me, Mrs. Cupp, so there!" she sobbed. "Nan is shamefully abused. You can punish me all you want to, Mrs. Cupp, only don't tell me to keep my mouth closed for a week, for I—just—could—not—do—it!"

"I believe you, Elizabeth," said the matron, drily, preparing to follow Nan Sherwood. "I will attend to your case later."

In the principal's office Nan found Linda in tears and Dr. Prescott looking very grave indeed.

"Do you know anything about the loss of Linda's necklace, my dear?" the preceptress said kindly to Nan.

"No, Dr. Prescott," whispered Nan, her face very white and her lips fairly blue.

"That is sufficient, Nancy. You are mistaken, Linda. And it is a mistake that can hardly be excused."

"You just take her word for it!" cried Linda, wildly. "And my father will about *kill* me when he knows grandmother's necklace is gone. "She's a——"

"That will do!" Dr. Prescott sternly warned her.

"I don't care! She's a pauper! Nobody else in the school is poor enough to *want* to steal. She tried to take my bag on the train——"

"No more of it!" commanded Dr. Prescott, rising angrily. "You are incorrigible, Linda. First of all, I want to know how you came to have the necklace to wear. Mrs. Cupp tells me she strictly forbade you to take it out of your trunk."

Mrs. Cupp entered at that moment. "Here's Henry," she said shortly to the doctor. "He has something to show you."

The man came in, wiping his snowy boots on the mat.

"What is it, Henry?" asked the troubled principal.

"This, Mum," said Henry, holding out something that glittered in his hand. "I reckon 'tis some gewgaw of the young ladies. I found it under a window with some trash from a wastepaper basket,

and I want you to be tellin' 'em again that I will *not* have 'em throwing trash out o' window."

"My necklace!" shrieked Linda, and leaped to seize it.

But Henry closed his hand, and Linda might as well have tried to open a bank-vault without the combination.

"Give it to me," said Dr. Prescott, soberly. "When did you empty your basket out of the window, Linda?"

"La—last night—after we got home from the ball. I forgot it yesterday and it was—was too full," wept Linda.

"And your necklace went out of the window with it," said Dr. Prescott, sternly.

"Look at that child!" suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Cupp. The matron crossed the room quickly and caught poor Nan before she fell. "She's just about made sick by this," she said tartly. "Why! she's fainted. And she's feverish! Here's a pretty to-do!"

The principal hurried to Nan's side and looked into her pallid face. "There is trouble here—more trouble than we know about," she whispered. "Don't take her to her room. In here! You may go, Henry. Thank you! And you return to your room, Linda. We will look further into this affair."

Half an hour later Mrs. Cupp came out of the principal's suite of rooms with a troubled face, and telephoned for Dr. Larry, the school physician.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BEAUTIFUL BEULAH

NAN did not know very much about it. She had a dreamy remembrance of the first day or two of her sojourn in what the girls called "the sick bay." She remembered Dr. Larry's kind face leaning above her; and she realized that he was there a great deal at first.

The fact was, the physician made a hard fight to ward off the threatened attack of pneumonia that he feared. Nan had been in a receptive state for sudden illness when she slipped into the icy water that morning—worried in mind, and having eaten little for several meals. Then was added to this the mental shock of Linda's accusation.

Her mind wandered, and Dr. Prescott and Mrs. Cupp heard a great deal about a "black ghost" and a "boy in black" who were trying to get Linda Riggs' necklace away from Nan. This troubled the girl greatly in her first delirium.

Then she wandered to Scotland and took up the burden of her parents' financial troubles. She tried to get them home on the boat, but they had no tickets, and the captain would not trust them for

their passage. These and many other imaginary troubles helped to confuse the poor girl's mind.

But finally the delirium settled into one thing. Nan wanted Beulah!

At first the principal thought she meant *her*. Dr. Prescott knew, of course, that her girls called her in affection "Dr. Beulah." She came to the bedside as often as Nan cried out the name. But soon it was apparent that the principal's kind and beautiful face did not assuage Nan's longing.

The girl talked intimately to "Beautiful Beulah" about "Momsey" and "Papa Sherwood." "If we were only back, all together again, in the little dwelling in amity," weakly cried the sick girl. "Oh, Beulah! I haven't been nice to you. I've been ashamed of you! I was afraid of what the girls would say, and that Mrs. Cupp would think I was a baby."

"What can the poor child mean?" demanded the worried principal, of the matron. "Dr. Larry says that this worrying over the mysterious 'Beulah' is doing her more harm than anything else."

Mrs. Cupp's face was very grim. She was not a sympathetic looking woman at best. Now she looked more severe than ever. She marched out of the sick room without a word. She had already removed from about Nan's neck the fine gold chain and key. In a few minutes she marched in again, to Dr. Prescott's unbounded surprise, and laid a

wonderful, big, pink-cheeked doll beside Nan in the bed.

Mrs. Cupp, it seems, had a pretty exact knowledge of everything hidden at the bottom of the girls' trunks, after all.

When Nan aroused the next time, there was Beautiful Beulah right in the crook of her arm. She smiled, hugged the doll close to her, took her medicine without a murmur, and went at once to sleep again.

"Poor little girl," said good Dr. Larry when he was told about it. "Of course that wasn't what has been really troubling her, Dr. Prescott. But the doll is connected with a happier time, when she was at home with her absent parents. With that wax beauty in her possession all troubles look smaller to her youthful mind."

"I did think Nancy Sherwood was too big for doll-babies!" sniffed Mrs. Cupp, refusing to show any further tenderness.

"I can see how she feels," said Dr. Prescott, understandingly. "I'm tempted to play with that beautiful thing myself. Nancy loves babies, and is as kind as she can be to the smaller girls. It would not hurt some of the girls older than she if they 'played dolls' again. They are altogether too grown-up."

Bess was at the door of the sick room morning, noon and night. As soon as the physician said there

was no danger, Nan's chum was allowed in the room. When she saw the big doll on the pillow beside Nan's head, she uttered a large, round "O!"

"Didn't you ever see it before, Elizabeth?" asked the principal, curiously.

"Oh—why! It's Beautiful Beulah! Beg pardon, Dr. Prescott! it isn't named after you. Nan had it ever so many years ago. My! I never suspected it was in existence. And to bring it to school with her! My!"

Nan's vitality brought her out of the "sick bay" in a short time. She lost only a week from her books altogether. That, she told herself, did not so much matter when her time at Lakeview Hall was to be so short.

But she was faithful, and hurried to make up the lost recitations. Linda Riggs was in retirement, disgraced before the whole school. She had been obliged to publicly deny the story she had started about Nan Sherwood and the lost necklace. And, too, the necklace had been sent by registered post to Mr. Riggs with a sharp letter from Dr. Prescott reminding him that the girls of Lakeview Hall were not allowed to wear such jewelry.

Some of the girls were inclined to poke fun at Nan's big doll, which was brought up into Room Seven, Corridor Four, and given a place of honor there. But it was gentle fun, for the whole school was sorry for Nan now. They knew that she must

leave the Hall at the end of the term because of financial reverses, and the girls were beginning to find out how lovable she was, and to remember how kind she had been to everybody.

Procrastination Boggs crocheted a shawl for Beautiful Beulah and Laura Polk brought a tiny embroidered cap that fitted the doll's head perfectly. Bess made leggings for Nan's "child" and Gracie Mason presented a pair of fur-trimmed boots. Really, there never was so lucky a doll "baby" as Beautiful Beulah, for she had presents galore.

Nan could not refuse any of these gifts, and most of them came with funny little notes. The doll was made much of by everybody in Corridor Four. She was decked and re-decked in all the finery that came to her and many of the girls "looked in" at Room Seven every day, just to see how Nan's "child" got along.

The girl from Tillbury began to notice that some of the biggest of them liked to hold the doll and dress and redress it; and "there was a deal of fuss," as Mrs. Cupp said, made over the pretty blue-eyed thing.

Finally Laura had a bright idea. She suggested that a party be given in Beautiful Beulah's honor.

"A regular, sure-enough, honest-to-goodness party!" she cried. "Why not? Everybody bring something to give the child—have a regular 'shower' party."

"Goodness! haven't we had parties enough for one term?" demanded Nan. "That one at the boathouse seemed to fill the bill."

"Oh, nothing like that! We might not get out of it so easy again," admitted the red-haired girl. "And, anyway, that's ancient history. Let's have it in the afternoon and feed 'em tea and cakes."

Bess was enthusiastic immediately. She had been quite subdued since the boathouse party, and Nan's sickness; she was "just aching" for something to happen! Anything "doing" always delighted Bess; but the trouble with Nan's chum was, she *would* try to mix the business of studying with pleasure.

She started to crochet a "fascinator" (so Amelia Boggs called it) for Nan's doll, and fearing she would not get it done in time she carried the crocheting with her into German class. Frau Deuseldorf was not particularly sharp-sighted; but her hearing was not failing; and when she addressed Bess twice without receiving any reply it was only natural that the German teacher should step down from the platform to see what the brown head was doing, bent so low over Elizabeth's book.

"Vell, vell, vell!" exclaimed the teacher, in some excitement. "Vas iss?"

"Oh! One, two, three, *and* four!" muttered the earnest Bess. "Did—did you speak to me, Madam?" and the girl looked up dreamily, poising the crocheting needle before taking up the next stitch.

"Ach! what is the child doing?" demanded the lady, seizing the work in Bess' hand.

"Oh, Madam Deuseldorf!" shrieked Bess. "You made me drop a stitch."

"Drop a stitch? Drop a stitch?" repeated the lady, in some heat. "Undt vy shouldt you have stitches to drop in classroom? Tell me that, please!"

"Oh—oh—I—I——" poor Bess stammered. Frau Deuseldorf could be very stern when she wished.

"What iss this for?" demanded the teacher, holding up the confiscated "fascinator" and shaking it in the air so that all the girls began to giggle.

"It's for the party," blurted out Bess, very red in the face.

Just then Dr. Beulah and half a dozen visitors—some of them gentlemen—entered the classroom. The situation was tragic—for poor Bess. There stood Frau Deuseldorf in commanding attitude, her back to the door, unconscious of the approach of the preceptress and her friends, and waving the unfinished bit of crocheting in the air.

"For why did you come here to Lakeview, Miss?" demanded the teacher. "To knit—to sew—to *play?* Ach! I do not teach a class in baby-doll r-r-rags, I hope! Remove yourself to the platform, Miss. Take this—this plaything with you. Sit down there

that the other pupils may see how you employ your hands and mind in class——"

She turned majestically and saw the amused visitors. Even Dr. Beulah seemed to relish the situation, for her eyes twinkled and her lips twitched a little as she said—to cover the German lady's confusion:

"The time is not propitious for a visit to *your* class, Madam, I can plainly see. We will withdraw."

She did not speak sternly; but Nan—who was watching—saw that Frau Deuseldorf turned strangely pallid and that her hands shook as she went back to her desk, following the angry and tearful Bess. After a moment, when the girls had settled into something like their usual calm, and had stopped giggling, the lady leaned over and patted Bess softly on the shoulder.

"Never mind, my dear," she said, her voice vibrant with some feeling that the girls who heard her did not understand. "Put the foolish trifle on my desk here and go back to your book. You are punished enough. Ach! perhaps I am, too."

And Nan Sherwood noted the fact that the German lady was much troubled during the rest of the session. She wondered why.

Like several of the instructors at Lakeview Hall, Frau Deuseldorf did not sleep on the premises. "Mister" Frau Deuseldorf kept a delicatessen shop

in town and the couple had rooms behind the shop. The German instructor's husband, whom all the girls called "Mister Frau Deuseldorf," was a pursy, self-important little man, with a bristling pompadour and mustache. He was like a gnome with a military bearing—if you can imagine such a person!

When Frau Deuseldorf put her heavily shod foot over the threshhold of the delicatessen shop she at once became the typical German hausfrau, and nothing else. Her University training was set aside. She cooked her husband's dinner with her own hands and then served him in approved German style.

It was the very afternoon of Bess Harley's trouble in German class that Nan and she chanced to have an errand in town and obtained permission from Mrs. Cupp to go there. The girls often bought delicacies of Mister Deuseldorf—his cheeses and *wurst* had quite a special flavor, and he made lovely potato salad that often graced the secret banquets at Lakeview Hall.

As Nan and Bess came along Main Street, there was the little, bristle-haired Teuton, standing at his door. His bald head was bare and he wore carpet slippers and no coat. As the light was fading, he evidently had come to the door to read a letter which he held close to his purblind eyes.

"Frau Deuseldorf hasn't come down from the Hall yet—mean old thing!" ejaculated Bess.

"You needn't call her names. *I* think she was awfully easy on you," Nan said, smiling. "And she seemed worried, too, because Dr. Beulah caught the classroom in such a turmoil."

"Well, it wasn't *my* fault," grumbled Bess, knowing, of course, that it was, but wishing to excuse herself if she could.

Nan made no immediate reply. She was watching the little German compassionately. As he stood there in the open door scanning the rustling sheet of paper, the girl saw that frank tears were running down his plump cheeks. Nan clutched her chum's wrist, and whispered:

"Oh, Bess! what do you suppose is the matter with Mister Frau Deuseldorf?"

"What? How? Oh!" exclaimed Bess, likewise seeing the little man's emotion as he turned back into the shop. "Why, Nan!"

"Yes," said Nan. "He was crying."

"Let's go in," suggested the impulsive Bess. "Maybe he will tell us about it."

"But—but—I wouldn't like to intrude," Nan said.

"Come on! We'll buy a pickle," exclaimed Bess. "Surely he won't think *that* very much of an intrusion."

When the tinkling little bell over the door announced the girls' entrance the German appeared from the rear premises, wiping his eyes on a checked

handkerchief. He knew the two girls from the Hall by sight.

"Goot afternoon, fraulein," he said, in greeting. "Iss de school oudt yet?"

"Most of the classes are over for the day, sir," Nan replied, as Bess took much time in selecting the wartiest and biggest pickle in the Deuseldorf collection.

"Iss mein Frau come the town in yet?" pursued the little man, whose idiomatic speech often amused the girls when they came to the store.

"I believe she was correcting exercises, sir," Nan said, smiling. "I expect we girls make her much extra trouble."

"Ach!" he responded. "Trouble we haf in blenty —yes. But *that* iss light trouble. Idt iss of our Hans undt Fritz we haf de most trouble. Yes!"

Nan and Bess knew that the German couple worked only, and saved and "scrimped" only, for the support of two grown sons in the military service of the Fatherland. They desired that Hans and Fritz should have the best, and marry well. But for a young Prussian officer to keep up appearances and hold a footing among his mates, costs much more than his wage as a soldier.

"I hope your sons are well, Herr Deuseldorf," Nan said, speaking carefully.

"Vell? Ja—they no sickness have. But there

iss more trouble as sickness—Ach! mein Frau, she come!" he exclaimed.

Bess had selected the pickle. The little German gave them no more attention, but darted out from behind the counter to meet Frau Deuseldorf as she entered the shop. He waved the letter he had been reading excitedly, and began in high-pitched German to tell his wife the news—and news of trouble it was, indeed, as the two American girls could understand.

Both Bess and Nan had studied German a year before they came to the Hall, and rapidly as the little man talked they could understand much that he said. The slower replies of his startled wife they could likewise apprehend.

Nan and Bess clung together near the door, hesitating to depart, for Mister Frau Deuseldorf had not given Bess her change.

Hans was in trouble—serious trouble. His brother, Fritz, wrote that it would take all the old couple's little savings to save Hans from disgrace; and one brother's disgrace would seriously affect the career of the other.

"And perhaps I have offended the good Dr. Prescott this very day," cried Frau Deuseldorf. "You know how it was at that other school last year, Henry." (The German teacher had only been at Lakeview Hall half a year before this present term.) "Dr. Prescott, too, is very, very stern. She en-

tered my classroom, with friends, just as one of those thoughtless girls had made me excited. The room was in a turmoil—Ach! it would be terrible now if the doctor requested my resignation."

Nan drew Bess outside into the street. "Never mind the change, Bessie," she begged.

"Oh! I'm so ashamed of myself," sighed Bess. "I never knew people had so much trouble. And those sons are men grown!"

"Their children, just the same. But I know she is over-anxious about her position. I don't suppose the little shop earns them very much. It is probably her salary at the school which goes to Germany. Oh, my dear! you don't suppose Dr. Beulah *is* angry with Frau Deuseldorf because she does not keep good order in her classes? We do bother her a lot."

Bess was very serious. "I know *I* do," she admitted. "Sometimes it's fun to plague her—she gets excited so easily, and forgets her polite English."

"We mustn't any more," said Nan.

"I just know what I am going to do," muttered Bess; but Nan did not hear her.

Elizabeth was impulsive; of late she had shown more strongly than before the influence Nan Sherwood's character had had upon her own disposition. She felt herself at fault because of the scene that

day in German class and Frau Deuseldorf feared she would be blamed for it.

Dr. Beulah Prescott had never seemed like a very harsh person to Bess; but the girl approached the office that evening before supper with some timidity. It had always been a hard thing for Bess Harley to admit that she was wrong in any case; and now, when Dr. Beulah was looking at her quizzically, the girl from Tillbury shrank from the ordeal.

"Miss Elizabeth! you do not often seek my desk, my dear," said the preceptress pleasantly. "What is it you wish?"

"Oh, Dr. Prescott!" exclaimed Bess, going headlong into the matter as usual. "It's about Frau Deuseldorf."

Dr. Prescott's pretty brows drew together a little; but perhaps it was a puzzled line instead of anger.

"What about your German instructor?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, dear Dr. Prescott! you won't blame her for that trouble in class to-day—will you? It was I. I did it. I was crocheting instead of attending to the work. And you know how easy it is for her to get excited. Please blame me and not her, Dr. Prescott."

"My dear child!" gasped the lady, in some surprise. "Perhaps I do not just understand. Sit down here. Now, be quiet, and don't sob so. Tell me all about it."

And Bess managed soon to control herself and explain fully her reason for coming to "beg off" for Frau Deuseldorf. The preceptress listened quietly; nor did she smile at Bess Harley's way of trying to straighten out the affair.

"You are a kind girl," she said, "and I am glad to see that—despite your thoughtlessness—you consider others. You should consider the Madam always in class, for she has a hard time enough at the best. I know she is easily excited; but I judge her work from results. I am quite satisfied with her and have no intention of disturbing her about that contretemps to-day. Indeed, I should not have mentioned it to her had you not told me how she felt about it.

"I will send Henry down town with a note at once to her. She shall sleep in peace to-night, after all, if my assurance of good will and sympathy will help her to do so."

The news of the German teacher's trouble circulated among the girls and it was noticeable that those who took German were more careful about giving the good, if excitable, lady trouble during the weeks that immediately followed.

Meanwhile Bess finished the "fascinator." The other girls friendly to the chums in Room Seven, Corridor Four, brought gifts, too. Beautiful Beulah had an afternoon reception that was the talk of the Hall for weeks.

Of course, the little folk came; Nan was friends with every child in the primary grades, and she invited them to come and bring their dolls. There was tea and cakes enough for all; and the "reception" overflowed into the corridor. Mademoiselle Loro (who had taken a great fancy to Nan Sherwood) presided at the tea-table. The little Frenchwoman had by no means forgotten her youth and she did not cast any "damper" upon the occasion, as Bess Harley was afraid she would.

"I don't know how it is, Nan," said Bess, when the entertainment was over and they were alone. "You are just the funniest girl I ever heard of. Any other girl would never have thought of inviting a teacher to a doll's party; if she had, the girls would have been afraid to come. But we had a splendid time, and I shall try to please Mademoiselle more in the future. She's an awfully nice old thing."

Nan only smiled. In her wise little brain this very result had been foreseen. She had begun to see that when the girls and the teachers only met in the classroom, or at meals, they did not "warm up to each other"; social intercourse with their instructors made the girls less antagonistic toward them.

The weather grew colder and the ice was pronounced safe. Skating began, and the chums from Tillbury soon showed the other girls how well they

could skate together. Walter Mason declared he had just as soon skate with Nan Sherwood as with any boy he knew.

Nan and Bess went down to Mrs. Cupp's room one day to ask for the privilege of going to town to get their skates sharpened. It was late afternoon and growing dusky in the stairways. There was no light in Mrs. Cupp's room.

Before the girls reached the top of the flight leading to the basement they heard the matron scream. Then a sharp, shrill voice cried:

"I want my money! Give me my money! You and Miss Vane are trying to keep it from me. I want my money!"

"Go away! Go away!" the startled girls heard Mrs. Cupp murmur.

"I'll haunt you! I'll foller you——"

Bess had uttered a cry. Out of the matron's room scuttled a thin, black figure, which darted down the stairs.

"The boathouse ghost!" gasped Bess, clinging to Nan, in fright.

"Goodness!" returned Nan. "If it is, he's a long way off his beat, isn't he? Boathouse ghost, indeed!"

But when they went into the matron's room they found Mrs. Cupp lying back in her chair, in a pitiable state of fright.

CHAPTER XXIX

ALL ABOUT THE BOATHOUSE GHOST

SUSAN, her black face set in a very grim expression, came to wait upon Mrs. Cupp. "Go 'long, chillen," she commanded, "I'll 'tend to her."

"But she's been dreadfully frightened, Susan," cried Nan, sympathetically.

"She saw a ghost, Susan," whispered Bess, perhaps a little wickedly.

Susan rolled her eyes. "Go 'long, chile! Wot ghos'?"

"The boathouse ghost, I declare!" said Bess, with decision. "Wasn't it, Nan? All black—and small—and it squealed. Didn't it, Nan?"

"It was a boy," said her chum. "And he ran down cellar. Somebody ought to look into it."

"Into the cellar?" asked Bess, with a giggle, as Susan "shooed" them out of the matron's room and shut the door at their backs.

"Yes. Just that," said Nan, decidedly.

"Where do you suppose that boy went—if it was a boy?"

"I know," Nan said, hesitating at the top of the stairs."

"You *know*?" cried Bess.

"Positively!"

"Goodness me! Is this another of your secrets, Nan Sherwood? You are the very meanest girl for a chum——"

"I never told you about this because so many other things came in between and made me forget," confessed Nan, quickly. "Come on! Let me show you."

She started down the basement stairs, but Bess hung back.

"I don't know about following a ghost."

"Nonsense! It's only a boy," said Nan. "He's the very boy who pulled me out of the water the other morning. And he's somebody else, too!"

"I don't know what you mean, and I don't know where you're leading me," grumbled Bess.

"To the trunk-room," said Nan, answering one question.

"But that boy could not get in there. The door's locked."

"We'll see," said Nan, hurrying on.

In a few moments they were down the dark passageway and at the door. It was wide open.

"Now, how do you suppose that happened?" queried Bess. "Mrs. Cupp is so particular about keeping it locked."

"The boy opened it when he came through," said Nan.

"From the inside?" gasped Bess. "Do you think he's been hiding in one of the trunks?"

Nan showed her quickly that the knob of the spring lock was on the inside of the trunk-room door. One could easily get out of the room without a key.

"But for goodness' sake!" cried Bess. "Tell me how he got in here?"

"That's what I am going to show you," said her chum, laughing. As they walked down the long room, Nan snapping on a light here and there to show the way, she told her chum about the movable part of the partition and how she had made the discovery.

Bess' interest and curiosity was roused to the highest point.

"What did I tell you, Nan Sherwood?" Bess cried. "There is an underground passage down to the boathouse!"

"We'll just see," agreed Nan.

They pushed down the movable part of the partition. It was dark inside, and dank, and there was a musty smell. Once assured that there was nothing supernatural about the black figure they had seen, Bess was as brave as a lion. She ran for a lantern which she knew was in the scullery, lit it, and brought it to Nan, who sat on the door over the mysterious well. By the light of the lantern the chums saw a flight of stone steps cut in the very

rock of the bluff on which Lakeview Hall stood leading downward into a seemingly bottomless, walled pit.

"Here's the smugglers' path to the boathouse!" Bess declared eagerly.

"Oh, nonsense!"

"Well, I don't care," cried Bess, pouting, "I bet this is the way the boy went down. And came up, too, to frighten Mrs. Cupp."

"That may be," agreed Nan.

"What did he want to frighten her for?" demanded Bess. "Did you hear what he said about his money? Maybe he's crazy. Oh, my!" and Bess hesitated with her foot on the top step.

"If he is, we two can manage him," said Nan, decidedly. "Come on."

Nan was sure that the strange boy who had helped her out of the water more than a week before, was the figure she and Bess had seen in the boathouse, and who had chased Mrs. Cupp the night of the boathouse party.

Why he was hanging about the school, and was troubling Mrs. Cupp and her sister, Miss Sadie Vane, was explained by the story Susan had told Laura Polk about the boy who had been "Miss Vane's bond-slave." Nan could imagine grim Miss Vane being very severe with boys; nor did Mrs. Cupp love them.

Nan and Bess went down the long flight of sub-

terranean stairs, quite as long, of course, as the outside steps down the face of the bluff. They finally came to an unsuspected cellar under the unused portion of the boathouse. There was a trap in the ceiling of this cellar, and it was open. Bess held the light and Nan reached up, took hold of the edges of the hole, and drew herself up into the room. Then she stooped down and gave her hand to Bess, who quickly came up with the lantern.

"Great!" gasped the eager Bess. "If Mrs. Cupp knew we were doing this, she'd have a sure-enough 'conniption,' as Laura calls it."

"My! I hadn't thought of that," Nan said doubtfully.

"Oh, come on" cried the more reckless Bess.

"Well—we've come so far, we might as well see it through."

Just then they heard excited voices outside.

"Oh! what's that?" whispered Bess.

"It's Walter's voice!" Nan exclaimed.

"And that squeally one is the ghost's," Bess declared.

The two girls ran to the side door. It, likewise, was unlocked. On the step, Walter Mason held the smaller boy so that he could not get away.

"Hullo, girls!" was Walter's greeting. "Why, Nan! I'm glad to see you out again. But what are you doing down here at the boathouse? And who is this chap I just caught coming out?"

"It's the ghost," cried Bess, giggling.

"I ain't no ghost," protested the boy in black, shivering in the cold. He wore no overcoat, his shoes were broken, and his hands uncovered.

"The ghost?" repeated Walter, puzzled. "Is he what frightened you girls around here?"

"And Mrs. Cupp! Oh, he frightened her awfully!" cried Bess.

"Well, I don't care! she was mean to me," declared the boy. "And Miss Vane tied my hands and feet to a chair and made me sit up all night in the dark. And now a feller who used to live at the poor farm and who I met when I ran away from Miss Vane told me that some money had been left me by my father's uncle. And Miss Vane and Mrs. Cupp's got it, I don't doubt!"

"Who are you?" asked Nan, softly. "Don't be afraid of us. If we can, we will help you. Bring him inside, Walter. It isn't as cold here as it is out of doors. Do come in."

"I'm Hiram Pease," said the strange boy, plainly glad to tell his tale to anybody who showed sympathy. "Miss Vane took me from the poor farm. I'm an orphan. She treated me real mean. And I don't like Mrs. Cupp, either. I don't see how you girls stand her."

"I guess she likes girls better than she does boys," said Nan, quietly.

"And now I bet they have got that money from

my great uncle, and I want it!" exclaimed Hiram, who seemed to be of a rather vindictive nature, and not a very pleasant person. He was underfed, undersized, and unhealthy looking.

"How have you lived here all this time?" cried Nan, pitying the boy.

"I stole some of that stuff you girls had for your party," replied Hiram Pease, grinning. "And I took other things. I found that flight of steps up into the cellar of the Hall. So I could get to the kitchen at night.

"And then I worked around for some of the folks that live up on the back road; and others gave me things——"

"And I guess you helped yourself to some of my pigeons and squabs," put in Walter, with some disgust. "I found where you roasted them."

"Well! I had to eat somehow," pleaded Hiram, in defense. "And if I ever get my money, I'll pay you back."

"What'll we do with him?" asked Walter, of the girls.

"You take him home and feed him and give him an old overcoat to wear," said the practical Nan.

"All right."

"And let him tell your father about his money—if *that's* true," said Nan, more doubtfully. "Your father is a lawyer. He will know just what to do."

"All right!" cried Walter, again. "I'll do that. Come on, Hiram Beans——"

"Pease."

"All right. Peas or Beans—what's the odds?" said Walter, laughing. "What Nan says to do is always right."

The boys departed, and then the chums hurried back to the hall by the subterranean passage. Nobody had discovered their absence; but afterward they told Dr. Prescott about their adventure, and the door in the partition between the trunk-room and the well was nailed up.

CHAPTER XXX

A GREAT SURPRISE

THE girls all admitted that it was the very strangest thing that could possibly have happened! The Hall did not seem like itself. The students stood around in groups and talked about it. The reckless ones took advantage of it and did almost as they pleased. The more conscientious pupils said: "We must help Dr. Beulah all we can by being particularly good just now." The younger pupils went past a certain closed door behind the main stairway on the first floor on their tiptoes and with hushed voices.

For four whole days nobody saw Mrs. Cupp about Lakeview Hall!

The girls were told that private business had called her away. But some of the older ones, especially friends of Nan and Bess, knew that it was Miss Vane's business, and not the matron's that had called the latter away. Mr. Mason had gone into court on behalf of young Hiram Pease, made the town farm authorities show cause why they had ever bound the boy out to Miss Vane, the village milliner, and made rather pointed inquiries as to

what had become of the legacy that Hiram's great uncle had left him.

In the end the local paper told all about it. And, really, there was nothing in the story to hurt Mrs. Cupp's reputation, and the only fact brought out in the testimony against Miss Vane was that the maiden lady had not understood boys, and had been so harsh to Hiram that he had run away and for more than six months had haunted the old boathouse below Lakeview Hall, living precariously on what he could pilfer here and there.

In the end, Hiram's affairs were straightened out and a kindly clergyman was made guardian of the boy during his minority. He was to have an education and a chance to be like other boys. Mrs. Cupp came back to her duties as grim as ever, and nobody dared to question her about it, least of all any of the girls.

The Christmas holidays were approaching, and Grace Mason brought an invitation from her mother for Nan Sherwood and Bess Harley to spend a portion of the vacation at the Mason home in Chicago. Bess accepted eagerly, for the Masons were very delightful people, and an invitation to their town house was a compliment indeed.

Nan, however, answered no. "I am sure I cannot do it, Gracie," she said, over and over again. "I have to meet my father and mother when they come back from Scotland, and go home to Tillbury with

them. And—and my school days are quite, quite ended. I shall have to begin to think of more serious things."

She would give Walter no more satisfaction, either. Even when Mrs. Mason wrote a personal note to Nan, repeating the invitation, the girl could only write in return that she saw no possibility of circumstances allowing her to be with her friends in Chicago during the holidays.

This only goes to show how little we really know in this world of what is to happen to us, even in the immediate future; for if the reader cares to learn what actually happened to Nan and her friends that very vacation at the Mason city home, she need only read the next volume of this series, entitled: "Nan Sherwood's Winter Holidays; Or, Rescuing the Runaways."

How such a change came about in Nan's plans and circumstances, was a great surprise, indeed.

The end of the term was in sight. Nan had caught up in her missed studies and her standing was very satisfactory, indeed. Dr. Prescott had praised her for her record.

"I shall be as sorry to lose you, my dear, as any pupil I ever had," declared the preceptress. "And I still hope that some way may be found to make possible the continuation of your course here at the Hall."

That had pleased Nan immensely; but she had no

hope of the principal's wish coming true. She tried to keep her record high to the very last day, not even neglecting Professor Krenner's lectures upon architectural drawing.

Amelia and Nan attended the last of these one afternoon at the professor's cabin, up the lake shore. They skated up the cove to the strait behind the Isle of Hope. In warm weather the girls sometimes went picnicing to the Isle of Hope. It was a rocky eminence thrust out of the lake, half a mile off the mainland.

Professor Krenner's cabin was a very cozy place —a single big room, with a fireplace at either end in which the flames now leaped ruddily among the birch sticks, and with a corner cut off with Navajo blankets for a bedroom. One side wall was hung with the professor's drawings; the one opposite with many cured skins of birds and beasts, for the professor was a taxidermist.

When the work of the architectural drawing class was over, Professor Krenner took his silver bugle down from the wall and went outside with the girls to wake the echoes on the Isle of Hope. He had just lifted the bugle to his lips and sent the first call ringing across the ice:

Ta-ra! ta-ra! ta-ra-ra-ra! Ta-*rat!* when Amelia seized Nan by the arm and cried:

"Oh! who's coming?"

They all looked down the strait. A figure in a

red cap was dashing up the ice at great speed, and waving a tippet in a most excited manner.

"Why!" gasped Nan. "It's Bess!"

They went down to the shore to meet Nan's chum. Bess rushed up to them and threw herself into Nan's arms.

"Guess! Guess what's happened, Nan Sherwood!" she fairly shrieked.

"I—I couldn't," gasped Nan, actually turning pale.

"You've got to! You've got to guess! It's the very wonderfulest thing——"

"'Wonderfulest'?" murmured "Procrastination Boggs." "That's a new one. I'm going to look it up."

"I couldn't guess, Bess," said Nan again, weakly.

"You haven't got to leave Lakeview Hall!" cried the delighted Bess. "You are coming back next term!"

Nan's color came back. She sighed and wiped her eyes. But she shook her head slowly. "No, dear, I told you before I could not accept your father's help. It would not be right," said Nan.

"Oh, nonsense! Who said anything about that?" demanded Bess, in disgust. "I heard 'em talking about it! Things are all right! Your folks have got some money after all! And they sent me after you!"

"Who sent you after me?" suddenly cried Nan,

seizing the reckless and excited Bess by the shoulders.

"Oh! oh! ouch! Dr. Beulah, of course!"

"What for?" demanded Nan, exasperated, and fairly shaking her.

"Why——Oh! didn't I tell you? Nan *dear!* Your father! And your mother! They have just arrived from Scotland, and they are waiting for you now in Dr. Beulah's office!"

Joy never kills—that is sure. But when she was folded in "Momsey's" arms, and "Papa Sherwood" stood by waiting his turn to hug his plucky little daughter, Nan really thought her heart would burst, it beat so hard.

It was not until later that she heard about the money, or cared to ask about it. Her parents had settled their business in Scotland so suddenly and had left for the United States so hurriedly, that they could send no further news about the settlement of Hughie Blake's legacy.

Under the Scotch law, no matter how many times a man has been married or how many children he has, he can will his personal property as he pleases. The two women who claimed the Laird of Emberon's steward as their parent could fight in the courts for possession of his real estate only; and most of the wealth Hughie Blake had amassed was in cash-in-bank.

Therefore Mr. and Mrs. Sherwood came home amply supplied with funds and the possibility of poverty for the family retreated below the horizon for the time being, at least.

Mr. Sherwood purposed going into business at once, and Nan could return to Lakeview Hall at the opening of the succeeding term. Meanwhile the present term came to a happy conclusion, and Nan and Bess looked forward with gleeful expectation to their visit to Chicago immediately after Christmas.

THE END